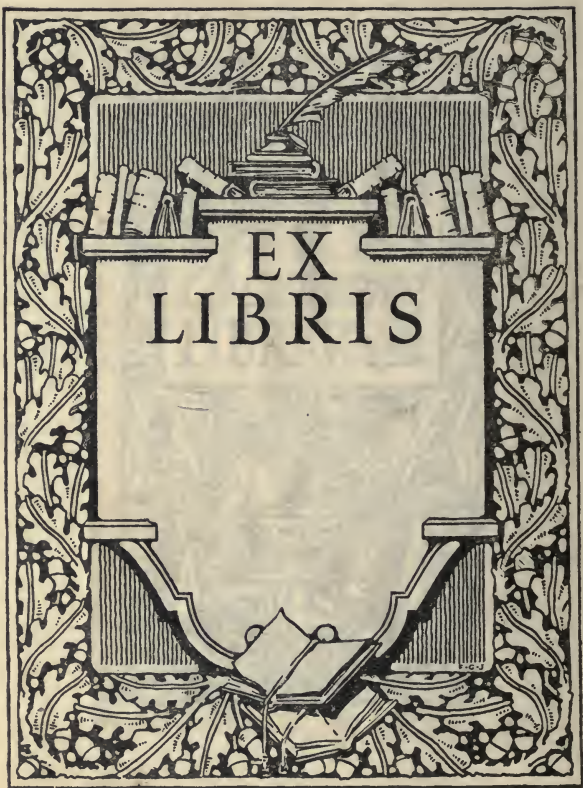
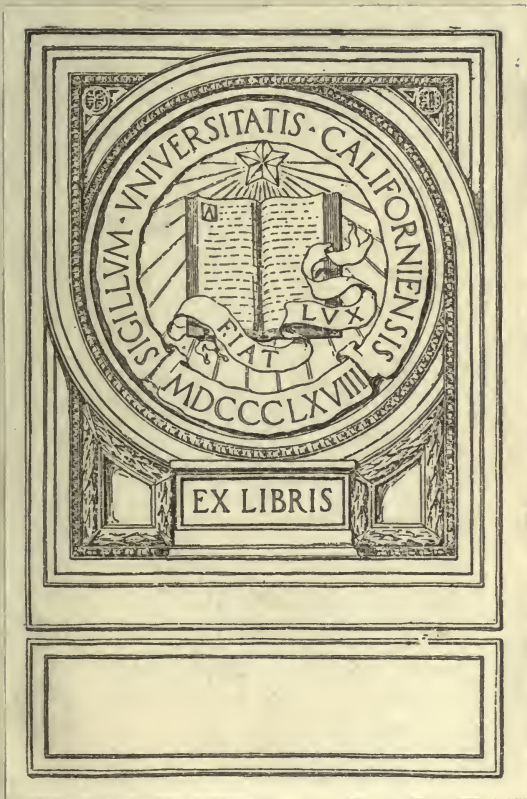




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**EIGHTEEN MONTHS IN THE  
WAR ZONE**



THE  
COLUMBIAN

TO THE  
ARMY



GOING ON DUTY AFTER A REST

# Eighteen Months in the War Zone

THE RECORD OF A WOMAN'S WORK ON  
THE WESTERN FRONT

BY  
KATE JOHN FINZI

With an Introduction by  
MAJOR-GENERAL SIR ALFRED TURNER, K.C.B.

*With Sixteen Plates*

CASELL AND COMPANY, LTD  
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**Dedicated**  
**TO THE MEMORY OF THOSE**  
**WHOM I HAVE LOST**

**458042**



## FOREWORD

WHEN the great history of this almost untellable War comes to be told, historians will find themselves faced with a collection of evidence so devious, so at variance, that their task will be well-nigh stupendous. Whether, when they come to sift their data, they will have time to cast more than a passing glance at the great military bases that sprung up in an allied country, where once an invading army had stood, remains to be seen. That these bases, and in especial the largest and nearest to the firing line, Boulogne, have played a large rôle in the scheme of things cannot be denied.

Yet, of all the many thousands who lived and passed through Boulogne, there remains not one who can tell of the gradual development of that once insignificant fishing town into one of the greatest bases in the War Zone.

Surely, therefore, it behoves those of us who love every inch of her harassing cobblestones; to whom her picturesque squalor is a thing of everlasting joy; those of us who see in the sun-bathed masts, half-hidden in grey mists, pictures whose

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Turneresqueness vies with Turner; who can clasp fisherfolk, peasants and townsmen by the hand and be proud to claim them friends—it behoves us to recapture what can never be recaptured again, because there is none left to tell the tale—a picture of Anglicised Boulogne in war-time.

True, our Boulognese coast is not riddled with fortifications like the approaches to an English naval port, nor are our fields honeycombed with trenches (though go past Calais, northward, towards Dunkirk, and you shall see what you shall see!). Yet there were days in 1914 when Boulogne promised to play a larger rôle in the history of England than she had ever played before—days when hospitals stood empty and all were prepared to evacuate the town at a moment's notice, in reply to the mayor's already printed mandates—days when, had the enemy but known how efficiently he had pierced the British lines, he might have realised his dream of devastating our island home and sweeping the coast with his long-range guns from Calais to Boulogne.

Those days will never return. Between us at the base and our enemies are a myriad valiant lives and countless guns of every size and device, a force, in fact, which no German strategy in the



## Foreword

world, scrupulous or unscrupulous, can overcome ; and still the little temporary British city grows and grows, a city of tents and red crosses and corrugated iron huts ; and still stalwart British forms, marching along the winding white roads, cast longing glances at the dim coast of distant Albion.

But it is not for those who heard the call in the later months so much as in memory of those early heroes of Mons, who knew the bitterness of a valiant retreat, the horror of forced marches along parched roads, with only the prod of the next man's bayonet to keep him awake, and only a flap cut from the tail of his shirt between the pitiless sun and the dreaded delirium that would leave him a prey to the Huns' barbarities ; in memory of these it is that I take up the pen to run the gauntlet of a thousand critical eyes on a way fraught with difficulties.

My acknowledgments are due to Mr. A. M. James for permission to use his photograph of the cemetery, and to my brother Edgar, whose patience in putting together what is of necessity a piec-y document has made the publication of this diary possible.

*"No easy hopes or lies  
Shall bring us to our goal,  
But iron sacrifice  
Of body, will, and soul.  
There is but one task for all—  
For each one life to give;  
Who stands if freedom fall?  
Who dies if England live?"*

—RUDYARD KIPLING.

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## INTRODUCTION

By MAJOR-GEN. SIR ALFRED TURNER, K.C.B.

IN the following pages Miss Kate Finzi gives in a plain, unvarnished style a terrible and graphic picture of the horrors of war, which have been intensified, as never before, owing to the ferocious savagery of the German troops, as systematically ordered by their officers and commanded by the Kaiser himself, the greatest criminal in the world's record ; for this war, planned and prepared deliberately by him, is the greatest crime ever committed against civilisation and humanity. It is charitable to designate him a criminal lunatic, or, as his prototype Caligula was described, an epileptic, with highly developed criminal instincts.

When one reads of such sufferings as those described by Miss Finzi, one wonders for what end Providence can have allowed such an inhuman monster to exist and cause such sorrow, such suffering, such death and destruction to be inflicted on mankind.

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The books written upon the vast conflict are already legion, but I think this is the first record—a most pathetic and interesting record—of what happened at the base hospitals at Boulogne, where tens of thousands of wounded, maimed and mutilated incessantly arrived, to be passed on to England, or to linger there till death came as a happy release from their sufferings.

How many officers and men of those glorious “first seven divisions” which left these shores in August, 1914—a tiny but, for its size, an incomparable army, which stemmed the seemingly irresistibly flowing tide of von Kluck’s legions against Paris—the “contemptible little army of General French,” as it was described by the imperial braggart of Germany, lie buried near the spot where stands the memorial pillar in honour of Napoleon’s army of invasion in 1804. After the war it will be incumbent on us, with the approval of our firm and faithful Allies, whose spirit, bravery and skill in fighting has astounded the world, to raise another monument especially to the memory of our heroic countrymen who withstood the hordes of the Hun and thwarted his advance both on Paris and Calais.

Miss Finzi’s book is quite unpretentious, and

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is a simple record of facts which brings home vividly to our minds the sickening horrors of war and the awful sufferings that our gallant defenders have had to undergo in doing their duty, in the service of their King and country, for the honour and integrity of the Empire, and for the safety and protection of the people in this country in this great war of liberation. What they have been protected from can well be gathered from the openly expressed threats of the Germans—soldiers, military writers, professors and ministers of German religion—that the crimes and outrages which they committed in Belgium and France, Poland and Serbia, should be as nothing to those which they would make our people suffer. It is well that these things should be brought home to our people, who, owing to our insular position, have experienced nothing of the horrors of war and are apt to make too light of them from want of power to realise them.

Naturally there was great confusion at the base, owing to the suddenness with which war broke out upon nations entirely unprepared for it and taken by surprise, for, although dark suspicions of the evil designs of Germany lurked in many men's minds, the extent of the infamy



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of the Kaiser and his pan-German parasites did not enter into the minds of many people, not even in the case of those who, like myself, thought they knew Germans well. The latter veiled their innate brutality, their blood lust, and their intention to acquire world domination through brute force, with consummate craftiness.

Miss Finzi gives a graphic account of the troubles that had to be surmounted, owing to insufficiency of hospital requisites, beds, medicines, doctors and nurses; but this was inseparable from the nature of things, and has long since been righted. We may indeed be proud of our services of mercy; nothing can exceed their value and efficiency, namely the R.A.M.C. and our nurses. If our gallant soldiers and sailors engaged, through political blunder, in the "Gallipoli gamble" and Kut disaster had been as well tended and supplied as those in France, how many lives, thrown away through political ineptitude, would now have been spared to us!

Miss Finzi writes most modestly of her own work, but we know that she and all the genuine nurses and helpers worked devotedly and well, and that the deepest debt of gratitude is due from the nation to them, who softened the horrors of war



## Introduction

to our soldiers, who ministered aid to them when they were sore stricken by wounds or diseases, and mitigated their tortures. It must not be forgotten that for many months the capture of Calais seemed not improbable; the Huns had no doubts upon the subject, and time after time, as in the case of Paris and Verdun, the bloodthirsty Kaiser gave his vain and arrogant orders: "*To be taken at all cost, no matter at what sacrifice!*" A truly beneficent ruler and father of his people! The R.A.M.C. and nurses, therefore, were working at terrible disadvantage, with no certainty that the bestial and brutish enemy would not shortly appear, to wreak upon them his savage instincts of murder and lust, signs of which were constantly brought in to them: terrible wounds caused by expanding bullets, and, worst of all, accounts by eye-witnesses and victims of the perpetual and designed firing upon hospitals, dressing stations, stretcher-bearers, it being, apparently, a craze of the Germans to kill and ill-treat what is helpless and cannot resist them. Tales also were related of civil population—men, women and children—being butchered, and Red Cross nurses outraged in the most fiendish manner, and then mutilated and murdered. With such possible prospects and

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fate at the hands of men compared to whom the Huns of Attila, the Goths of Alaric, the Tartars of Timur and the Mongols of Genghis Khan deserved a crown of mercy. Imagine what our nurses are and what blessings they have brought to our soldiers and sailors. At the commencement of the Crimean War there were no Army nurses and no civil nurses, except those dreadful creatures described by Charles Dickens in "Martin Chuzzlewit," such as Sairey Gamp and Betsy Prig—fat, waddling, coarse, ignorant, unclean and unkempt, and usually smelling of gin; they attended births, sick-beds, and laying out of corpses, in which they took great pride, as it brought them in touch with the undertaker, to their mutual advantage. Contrast such so-called nurses, in their poke bonnets, smelly robes and clogs, with their huge, bulging umbrellas, their noisiness and heavy hands, with those of to-day, with their neat and serviceable uniform, their gentleness, their light hands, their kindness and sympathy with their suffering patients. As the late Dean Hole wrote in his "Now and Then," they might be compared to a beautiful yacht scudding along in a light breeze, under a blue sky and shining sun, while the ancient apologies for nurses rolled along, a water-

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(or gin and water) logged barge in the Thames in a thick, yellow November fog. (Dean Hole.)

It was to Florence Nightingale, of ever-blessed memory, that we owe the foundation of our Army nursing system in 1854. When the news of the battle of the Alma came, and of many thousands of wounded men with no nurses and a totally insufficient medical staff, and *not a single ambulance*, she volunteered to take out a number of nurses. For a wonder her offer was accepted, for in those days every sort of change in Army matters was considered a pernicious innovation. She took out thirty-four nurses to the Crimea, and before long had 10,000 wounded in her charge. The work which she and her nurses did was marvellous, and they stuck to it till their health broke down, as our present nurses have done. After the war £50,000 was subscribed for the purpose of founding an institution for the training of nurses in connection with St. Thomas's and King's College Hospitals. From that time the Army nursing system has steadily developed under the practical and ever-ready patronage of Royalty, till it reached its present perfection. In the Soudan and South African Wars the services of the nurses were invaluable. When the present war showed itself to



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be one of such gigantic dimensions, and when our Army, due to the genius of Lord Kitchener, swelled to the size of millions, it was feared that a sufficient number of Army nurses could not be forthcoming; but then the women of England showed what they were made of. Hundreds and thousands devoted themselves at once to training as nurses, others to the less-skilled work required in hospitals for the victims of war; and now, owing to them and the admirable chiefs and subordinate officers of the R.A.M.C., and to the patriotic and self-sacrificing manner in which private medical practitioners have come forward with their services, little or nothing is wanted, considering the gigantic nature and scope of this terrible war.

Miss Finzi is to be congratulated upon having written a most interesting and readable book, full of facts and personal experiences, such experiences as, please God, no one will again have to relate; and this will be so when once the Hohenzollerns, the cause of all trouble in Europe and elsewhere for many decades, are exterminated or driven into obscurity.

The work shows forth in bright colours the universal devotion of our nurses—heroic women who face all dangers and hardships for the sake of

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doing good to others. Among these must ever stand forth the name of Edith Cavell, who spent her whole life in mitigating the sufferings of others, who nursed even German officers in her hospital who had probably committed unspeakable crimes and atrocities in Belgium. This weighed as nothing, as might have been expected, in the eyes of the barbarous Teutons, to whom mercy, justice and gratitude are unknown. She was done to death vilely and brutally, but her martyrdom will never be forgotten or forgiven; it will be one of the foulest of the many foul stains on the fame of the Kaiser and his accomplices, while it will ever shed a ray of glory upon the noble record of our British Nurses.

ALFRED E. TURNER.





**BOOK I**

**1914**

**As It Was in the Beginning**



# EIGHTEEN MONTHS IN THE WAR ZONE

## CHAPTER I

**October, 1914**

*October 21st, London.* It was not without a sense of relief that we watched the hands of the station clock move on to the stroke of six, heard the train doors slam, and cast a last look at the anxious little group of friends who clustered round the carriage doors to bid us farewell and God-speed.

To be quite frank, their cheering savoured somewhat of mourning and much of admonition.

Were we not the tattered remnants of a once-flourishing Red Cross detachment, whose energies and equipment alike had been left behind at the enforced evacuation of Ostend? Were we not about to face all kinds of undreamed-of perils?

So they whispered to us; but as we relapsed

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

into our seats, to the accompaniment of a cheery chorus of rag-times from the extensive répertoire of the recruits in a neighbouring carriage, our hearts beat hard with trepidation and anticipation of the Great Unknown. After all, who were we amongst the countless thousands clamouring to “get out” to the scene of action?

Merely two Englishwomen, of none too much experience and no too great age, whom it might please Fate to carry into the scene of action, there to play the smallest of parts and to be vouchsafed an insight into the vagaries of war.

*Southampton.* It was a clear, still, moonlight night when we reached Southampton, the docks silent and darkened. Outside many ambulance wagons awaited their turn to be loaded. The hotel to which we had been recommended had been commandeered as an embarkation office. Moreover, Mr. N——, the clergyman who was to have met us and finished the journey with us, failed to turn up. So, after passport formalities, we went straight on board.

All we carried by way of luggage was one small hand-valise apiece, containing, besides changes of underwear, the regulation Red Cross

## October, 1914

caps, aprons, dresses—that uniform so effective *en masse*, so unbecoming to the individual.

*October 22nd, s.s. —, 8 a.m.* The cabins were nearly all taken for the officers of the Irish regiment crossing on the boat, so we passed a more or less restless night in the saloon. As the stewardess said: “We like to give the men the best of everything. Who knows when they will next sleep in a bed?” It makes one choke to see these fine strapping fellows going out so cheerfully to meet their fate. It is only then that one ceases to think of war as a great game, and sees it as a great slaughter!

When we set sail the mysterious blue, herald of dawn, was over all, but we are entering Havre harbour in a sea that is black and dreary and full of forebodings.

*Le Havre.* The post office here might be in Finsbury, the cablegram window in Leadenhall Street, for Havre is full of British Tommies in their smart new khaki and gilt numerals and badges, and they walk up and down the streets in twos and threes—very much at home, or separately—equally lost.



## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

When we landed at Havre the Rev. E—— N——, our khaki-clad parson, joined us; and, having deposited our luggage at the station and lunched, we wended our way to the British Consulate, and British and French Red Cross offices, in the hope of gleaning some news of the rest of our party, who seemed to have vanished off the face of the globe.

Our Red Cross uniform carries with it a strange mixture of respect and suspicion—respect for the noble symbol we bear, suspicion on account of the many unlicensed people of somewhat doubtful repute who have flooded the country since the outbreak of war, perpetrating many indiscretions, opening many uncalled-for charities—all under the name of the Red Cross, with which, ten chances to one, they have no connection at all.

To us, however, everybody is so kind and courteous, and our parson, being a tall, white-haired man of military bearing, and in appearance much more like a general than a sky-pilot, commands universal respect and salutes.

We decided to spend a night at Havre and call early for news at the Consulate, and it was then that my modicum of French and *savoir-faire* in the ways of hotels and hotel proprietors



October, 1914

stood us in good stead, for the rest of the party knew no word of French and appeared never before to have travelled abroad.

At the Consulate we came across Lady —, one of the women we were seeking and who was supposed to be seeking us. As we entered the room a familiar voice rang out: "In the name of the Belgian Government you can do anything"—and we found ourselves face to face with the chic little woman who, charming though she may be at a London "at-home," is, we fear, liable to give our Allies a false impression of English women in war-time.

She has already courted notoriety quite successfully in Belgium, where she would appear at the most busy moment in the wards with a smile and a "*May I see round your hospital?*" only to be followed by her press-man with a camera. Seeing she has never, to our knowledge, done a day's work in the wards, we are growing tired of her portraits in the daily papers and weekly journals:

"Lady — rendering valuable aid to a severely wounded Belgian," or:

"A war heroine who is giving her services at the front."

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

We retired early, but the incessant sounds of coming and going made sleep impossible to me. As the moon peeped through the open window on to the restless form of my companion, I crept out of bed and knelt by the embrasure. She looked very young with her halo of fair hair, and for the first time I realised how utterly alone we were. It is odd how quickly people come into one's life nowadays, become the most important factor of existence, and, meteor-like, pass out of one's ken, leaving nothing but a fast-dimming memory to prove how large they once loomed on the horizon. After all—war or no war—we are absolute strangers, of different interests, different education, different social standing. Yet for weal or woe our lot is cast together. Only for a moment these thoughts assailed me; then the bigness of the Great Game in which we are to play our parts drove all little personal feelings away.

*October 24th, Rouen.* We arrived yesterday in the wild-goose chase after the Mrs. C—— who wired for us and was to have given us employment, and are installed at a little hotel perched on the top of the hill, from the windows of which

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we can enjoy the old garden, gorgeous in its autumn tints of brown, gold and green.

There being an over-sufficient number of well-equipped hospitals here, as in Havre, we have not bothered to inquire after work, but the Rev. E—— N—— has gone on to Paris, and so we spent the day enjoying the sights of Rouen. Of the beauties of the Gothic Cathedral of St. Ouen, of the smartness of our Tommies, of the less solid but strikingly lithe and businesslike-looking French soldiers, in their historic and treasured red trousers and blue coats, there is much to be said. Yet it is the incongruity of the cosmopolitan crowd that is most noteworthy.

Dusky Zouaves, in wide pantaloons and brilliant coatees, are to be seen on all sides—mostly with bandaged limbs, be it noted—and alongside swarthy Indian Mussulmans, clad in khaki and topped with turbans. Side by side with them go interpreters in mufti, Scottish soldiers in tartans and covered kilts. Little French girls walk past with R.A.M.C. badges and numerals pinned across their shawls; Army nurses, in grey and red; the usual crowd of dark Frenchwomen in their sombre weeds.

Watching the seething mass of humanity on

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

the quay, the marching soldiers, the footsore, homeless refugees, the motley crowd culled from every conceivable race and every quarter of the globe, it seems as if the Powers Above had decided to abolish the distinction between east and west, black and white, and weld together one race to combat the oncoming Germans. For surely we are pitted against a foe so strong in physique, and so brave and cunning, that many years of strenuous training and thrift will be required to fit the united races to withstand his onslaught.

*October 25th.* Mr. N—— returned last night from Paris armed with introductions to Lord —— at Boulogne headquarters, where we are to go, and the information that the Paris hospitals are being steadily cleared.

All this time we have had very little news. Since the fall of Antwerp on October 9th, and the beginning of the Ypres-Armentières battle two days later, we have had nothing but rumours to subsist on, and these alternately wildly optimistic and disquieting.

It seems so strange to think, while wandering through the churches here, glorying in the leisure to enjoy the exquisite contour of the Gothic arches,



October, 1914

the rich mediæval windows, the Renaissance chapels, that to those enemies, who are proving themselves such utter Vandals, we really owe so much of our knowledge of Art and Architecture. Can any cultured being who has at some time or another associated with his art-loving foe, studied his literature, perused Burckhardt, delved into the depths of Faust's philosophy and the heights of Zarathustra's madness; sat on Brunhilde's rock or felt the Valkyrie riding past in the furious sweep of the snowstorm; gazed from the heights of the Black Forest into the unknown stretch of sky beyond the blue hills with that yearning for beautiful things engendered by a land endowed by Nature with every gift; and, descending into the darkening forests, realised the milieu which inspired Grimm's "Fairy Tales" and Morgenstern, and even the translators of Ibsen and Jacobsen—can such a being fail to be nonplussed at this huge upheaval?

*October 26th, Train militaire.* We are passing through the lovely Norman country at a snail's pace in a military train bearing French soldiers to the front. Their distant "Marseillaise" sounds less hearty than our Tommies' "It's a long way



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to Tipperary," but then they already know the devastation War has wrought in their homes ; they are the defenders of an invaded country.

The cost of our ticket to Abancour (military rate, for our uniform amongst the French receives the utmost consideration) is 1 franc 50 centimes. After Abancour, it appears, there are no trains to Boulogne, so how we are to get across the sixty intervening miles no man knows !

*Abancour, 7.30 p.m.* We reached the neat little model village of Abancour at dusk. It stands on a wind-swept plain, over which the lowering clouds are scurrying menacingly this evening. Just as at Havre market women offered us flowers "for the blessed Croix Rouge," so here the proprietor of the post-card shop insists on giving us *pastilles de menthe* to take on our journey.

*Eu.* This is the nearest point we can get to Boulogne, and having knocked up the sleepy hotel-keeper at 10 p.m. to obtain a night's lodging, having made bovril for us all out of the tablets some good friend had thrust into my travelling kit, and served out rations of horse-flesh sandwiches and nuts to make them savoury, I have at last tumbled into my damp bed, wrapped in a travelling rug.

October, 1914

A dismal rain has set in, which brings to mind the words of the secretary at the Rouen Consulate :  
“ When winter sets in the fighting must temporarily cease. I know every inch of Belgium ; know, too, that no attack can be made on country so sodden that every wheel sinks at least a yard into the ground. Believe me, what the Germans have they will hold—at least this winter. For Belgium will be impregnable ! ”

*October 27th.* We arose at 5 a.m. to catch a train bound towards Abbeville, and, after a refreshing draught of black coffee in glasses, found ourselves installed in the train, with the prospect of staying there till 5 p.m. If we had wondered at finding Eu well guarded on all sides, we no longer did so when we learned that only a few weeks back it was in enemy hands, and formed, in fact, the German headquarters on the march on Paris.

Shortly before reaching Abbeville a young Belgian soldier in the carriage next door put his head in to inquire politely whether we were some of the *infirmières anglaises* who had tended the Belgian wounded in Ostend.

It appeared he recognised Miss A——, as soon as she doffed her ugly felt uniform hat, as the

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

nurse who had dressed his wounded back the day he was carried into the Casino hospital after the Battle of Termonde.

His career, which he sketched delightedly for our edification, perched on the arm of the window seat, had been eventful, to say the least of it.

Aged 17, Fernand L——, of Brussels, together with fifteen others of his school class of twenty, joined the ranks as *volontaires* and served through Namur. Captured by the Germans in a farmhouse where he was scouting, he contrived to escape and reach his native town, where the now famous burgomaster, the valiant M. Max, got his papers *viséd*. By asserting that he was only fifteen years old, and therefore not liable to military service, he finally reached Cherbourg, and is now on his way back to the front, hoping to join some regiment at Calais.

A charming boy, full of enthusiasm for the war and the conviction that we shall soon be marching into Berlin, his one regret, when he heard how the hospital equipment had had to be abandoned to the enemy, was that he had not helped himself to a much-needed blanket.

“Had I but known,” he exclaimed, “I would have taken four!”



October, 1914

Fernand L—— was clad in a wonderful combination of garments that he seemed to have gleaned on his journeyings; most remarkable amongst them were the green knitted socks and pair of canvas shoes which some Good Samaritan had given him at Ostend, in those days when even the supply of anæsthetics was apt to run low. Proudest of all was he of the fact that he had once spent a few days in Liverpool to play in a football match, which fact, he felt, bound him to his allies more than any of the forced ties of war. His companion, a few years his senior, who spoke seven languages, was a good-looking youth with a radiant smile. They had been together through various escapades, and were full of the atrocities of the Germans, which, alas! seem authentic enough.

Once when they were fleeing they had come to a deserted village where a farmer gave them shelter. His only daughter had been brutally mutilated and murdered before her own parents because, in resisting the embraces of an officer, she scratched out one of his eyes.

“They cut off her breasts and carried away a foot as a trophy,” was the tale they told.

As they got out, the Belgians, in token of gratitude, pressed into our hands the little paper

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flags of the Allies that they were wearing and buttons from their coats. Then, seizing a notebook from my pocket, Fernand L—— inscribed their names and addresses at Bruges, exacting at the same time promises that we would call and see them, or their families, on our way “to the Rhine in a few months”!

The well-guarded lines, the ammunition trains, the big guns and horses and other paraphernalia of war—how real it all begins to seem!

At Abbeville, where we explored the shops and camps and churches, a nasty rumour came through, via two cavalry officers, that the Germans are at Calais, and many of the townsfolk appeared at their doors to bewail their fate.

On leaving every place of beauty one wonders how long it will remain safe from the Vandals—one leaves it with a sentimental longing to linger for “one last look.”

*October 27th, Boulogne.* The sky was a lurid red as our train steamed into Boulogne, and an evening mist hung over the town. On all sides high masts rose into the sky; hospital ships, ambulance trains, little fishing-smacks, one does not know to which to give most attention. Every-





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where the population of picturesque fisherfolk in their brown blouses gives way admiringly to the Red Cross ambulances and officials who carry on their work on such an enormous scale.

The journey had seemed long enough in spite of its many incidents, as day by day we watched the pretty though uninteresting fields slip by, or restlessly paced the stations during the interminable halts, with little food for thought, save vague surmises as to the future, and little to eat save the slightly bitter bread of the people and apples, the only things obtainable at wayside stations already ransacked by the hordes of hungry soldiers who had passed through earlier ; and oftentimes we had been glad enough to descend from the carriages to refresh ourselves at the station pumps, marked "drinkable" or "non-drinkable," as the case might be.

We had formed an odd trio. The tall, bent figure of the clergyman, with his dreamy demeanour and utter obliviousness of all things practical ; my commandant, a young woman who, having spent most of her life at hospital work, hailed every diversion from the same gleefully. Everything to her was new, for she had never been out of England before, and to a veteran traveller

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her joy at the ways of this new country was extraordinarily interesting. Thirdly, there was myself, fresh from the salutary discipline of the wards of a London hospital.

And now it is all over, that journey. The destination is reached. The Unknown will soon be revealed.

The Commissioner to whom we were directed received us with open arms.

“Nurses—thank God!” was the exclamation as we were turned over to the mercies of the billetting officer, who designated an airy room overlooking the quayside, on the third floor of the Red Cross headquarters, for our use.

Yet it appears that in spite of the dearth of nurses there are many formalities to be gone through before we can begin work; and as only nurses who have had three years’ training in a big London hospital are to be accepted (for is anything but the *best* good enough for our fighting men?), there may be some difficulty for probationers.

Thus, having deposited our bundles in our billets, we were sent to see Lady —— at the hotel, where she combines the duties of lady-in-waiting to Queen Amélie of Portugal and organiser-in-chief of the Red Cross nurses.



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Here we learned for the first time of the confusion that arises out of the fact that both qualified nurses and members of the Voluntary Aid Detachment are wearing the same uniform; we heard, too, of the difficulties experienced by the authorities to prevent unlicensed people organising hospitals which they are unfitted to run.

As we wended our way back wearily through the lighted, crowded streets teeming with life (Miss A—— having signed a year's contract as a trained nurse), something told me that this is to be the scene of my activities too; that so long as my betrothed is in France, Providence will let me play my part.

On returning to headquarters we learned for the first time the unpleasant function of the Censor. All letters have to be left open, posted in the military box, and, if they are to pass the Censor, must contain no mention or description of places, troops, ships, people we have met on our journey, etc.

This is not merely a precaution against spies, we are told, but a measure of prudence in regard to false rumours; for men who have never got farther than Boulogne, and never been within gunshot, have been known to write home long tirades



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about the bloody trenches in which they stand all day, dodging fragments of shells and killing Germans by the score!

*October 28th.* After breakfast this morning we set out to see whether there were any letters from home at the Consulate. On our way up the hill a funeral overtook us. There were four hearses and seven coffins, each covered with a Union Jack, which contrasted strangely with the weird-shaped French funeral carriages and the drivers in costumes like beadles with large three-cornered hats.

We followed the cortège a quarter of an hour up the hill to the cemetery, where the newly consecrated ground was full of freshly covered graves.

The coffins were soon lowered, and as they lay there in a row not an eye of the little group of onlookers was dry.

The R.A.M.C. pall-bearers, the chaplain who went through the service with a rapidity that showed his familiarity with the job, a handful of French peasants—that was all. And they laid them to rest at the top of the hill, and only two English nurses who never saw them could bear the message of their last resting-place to their

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homes. God! that such wanton destruction should be.

Opposite our window, as I write, the ambulance men are deftly unloading a train and carrying their sad, still burdens aboard the hospital ship on which Miss A—— crossed from Ostend. All day long, all night long, the wagons come and go. Funerals pass, not one, but three, four, five at a time, followed by orderlies; turbaned Sikhs and Gurkhas, looking quaintly odd with their unaccustomed shirts (gifts, no doubt, from some willing helpers at home) hanging loose below their coats, like a flounced skirt, and creating a perfect sensation whenever they pass the simple peasant folk.

Later, we walked into Wimereux and took snapshots of the wounded Tommies who thronged the beach. They were mostly arm and leg cases, and a cheery, if rough-looking, lot too, in their bedraggled khaki, which, from the distance, was scarcely distinguishable from the sands.

The Reverend E—— N—— has found plenty to do, and is already taking work out of the over-taxed Bishop's hands. I, in the meantime, am making the best of my leisure and enjoying every hour of the sunshine. "Father N.," as we call the padre, got into conversation with an Army

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veteran to-day at lunch, whose views were interesting.

“Do you think the Germans will get to Calais?” he asked.

“Probably not; but if they do, they’ll make for here. This is the place they’re after—as a post for their submarines. And Heaven knows what we shall do with our stores. It won’t be possible to get them away in time!”

About a mile along the quay we came upon the debris of a camp with the fire still burning; piles of reaping machines, traction engines and carts, all bearing the names of English firms from Manchester to Crouch End, lay alongside; and, finally, in the distance there hove in sight the French refugee ship which was blown up in the Channel yesterday between here and Folkestone.

In the evening we joined a group of nurses round the fire. They are pleasant girls just down from Paris, where they did relieving work at some of the hotel hospitals.

The Astoria in particular they describe as a maze. “You go to get a drink of milk for a patient, and when you’ve found the milk you’ve lost your man and may hunt for hours, only to find in the end that his need has already been

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supplied," they say. Their assistants were culled from the French nobility, whose unflagging efforts to help are typical of France's indomitable spirit. Amusing incidents often occur.

One doctor, on being much pressed, accepted an invitation to tea with a well-known aristocratic family, who assured him they were inviting people who would be of *especial* interest to him. His amusement on arriving may be pictured when he found that the other guests consisted of a roomful of wounded Tommies.

Another doctor, overwhelmed by the amount of titles to whom he had been introduced, meeting a nurse in the corridor, began wearily with :

"Look here, I say, now, are *you* a blooming princess?" before he gave his orders!

In spite of the wonderful dirt and bad drainage that reigns in the nurses' quarters, we must be grateful, they say, for our accommodation. Nurses aren't expected to require much, it seems. Someone quoted the old chestnut from *Punch* of the lady who, on being asked by the newly arrived nurse in which room she was to sleep, exclaimed in blank amazement :

"Oh, but I thought you were a trained hospital nurse!"



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*October 29th.* Let me tell the tale of No. — Stationary Hospital. It should go down to posterity as a memorial of what British resourcefulness may achieve, even if its existence was the outcome of the proverbial British state of unpreparedness. For what in the annals of History has equalled the holocaust and chaos of modern warfare, of which there was no precedent, of which everything has had to be learned by the bitterest experience?

Three days before we left England, at the beginning of the fight for Calais, which continues to grow more violent daily, a certain Major N—— found himself in charge of the wounded who were being brought down by the thousand in trains, and left helpless on their stretchers by the quayside to await the arrival of the ever-busy hospital ships.

Already the C—— and I—— Hotels were *choc-à-bloc* with wounded, who lay so close together in the corridors that it was necessary to climb over one stretcher to reach the next patient, and often stand astride the pallets to dress the wounds.

The Casino was opened, but in less time than it takes to tell was as crowded as the others.

A disused sugar shed, a vast wooden barn whose



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cracked cement floor is piled high with dust, whose smashed glass roofing is besmirched with dirt, is hardly an ideal site for a hospital, but it is the best thing to hand, and the Major commandeered it, and here, before the lumber had been cleared, before the glass had been repaired or the walls whitewashed, the wounded began to tumble in. It wasn't much of a place, but it was out of the torrential rain which had set in and bade fair to continue, and it was less cold than the open air.

By day and night the orderlies worked, alternately preparing the place and attending to the wounded. A solitary English girl who happened to be on the spot had volunteered her services, and was doing her best single-handed in the wards. One day the Major, walking on the quay, saw some Red Cross nurses. They were the identical ones we had met on their arrival from Paris. On hearing they were waiting for their orders, and that they were all qualified women, he commandeered them, even as he had commandeered his barn. Back they came to Headquarters to fetch more assistance.

"Why don't you come too? It's a case of all hands aboard!" said one. It was thus I came to work at the first clearing station at the base. Such

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was the stationary hospital when, laden with all the loaves we could carry to supplement the ration biscuits, we set to work in the "casualty ward" this afternoon.

For the thousand wounded likely to come through daily there are six fully-trained nurses and myself, besides the male staff of R.A.M.C. doctors and orderlies, and two or three Red Cross surgeons and lady doctors.

Ten beds and a number of sacks of straw form the main equipment. Planks, supported by two packing-cases, are the dressing-table. At one end men are engaged in putting in three extemporary baths, others whitewashing the walls.

A boatload had just left for England as I came in, and we proceeded to get a meal for those who remained. But it was a struggle to get sufficient tea out of the orderlies, who had been working all night and were dead beat. The men's delight at the bread and old newspapers we had brought in was incredible.

Those who were able to, clustered round the solitary stove in the centre. Great rough, bearded fellows, covered with mud from the trenches in which they have lived for weeks, how

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different they look from those who set out! The worst cases lay on their stretchers as they had arrived. One said simply, as I took him his tea, "This is heaven, Sister."

A tall, dark man entered—the C.O., someone said. "Take those two Germans down to the boat," I heard him order. Then, turning to us, "You'd better come to our mess-room and get some tea yourselves," he said. "Four trainloads are expected in shortly."

We trooped into the small sanctum dignified by the name of "mess-room," where the Major's orderly was busy preparing tea on a Primus stove. There was no milk, but the bitter black beverage out of the large tin mugs was welcome none the less. Someone had secured a cake that we cut with a sword as the cleanest thing present.

Next to the mess-room are the officers' quarters (into which we were privileged to take one glance)—small whitewashed cubicles furnished with a camp bed, a shaving-glass about three inches by six inches in size, and an old sugar-box converted into a washstand.

Tea finished, we set to work to get "beds" ready for the next batch, the first of the four trainloads expected. Ten bedsteads for a thousand

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men! It sounds almost incredible, but it is nevertheless true; and although we are told that more are expected at any moment, we have only wooden pallets at present and a limited supply of blankets. One to lie on, two for cover, a coat for a pillow was the order of the day until a pile of mattresses came in.

*October 30th.* We worked till midnight and were on duty again by 7.30 this morning. From our billets to the hospital is nearly half an hour's walk, which, over the rough cobblestones in the blinding rain, is hardly attractive. At any rate, it has the advantage of clearing the haunting smell of the gas-gangrene out of our nostrils. As we came on duty this morning, laden with every old journal we could find, a huge, burly Scotsman let himself down from the ambulance train. We gave him a newspaper, but he was inclined to talk. He is the first man I've met so far who has signified his longing to get back to the firing-line.

"While I've a limb left," he said, "I should like to have a pot at the Germans. And I can fire my machine as well with two fingers as with five—if they'll let me."

The cause of his indignation was the mutilated





AT AN IMPROVED CASUALTY CLEARING STATION

"This is Heaven, Sister!"





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corpse of a Red Cross nurse they had found in a little village where the Germans had been.

“God knows how far they’d dragged her round with them, but she was horribly mutilated,” he said with a shiver. “I’m a big man, but our major was bigger, yet neither of us could help choking. And can ye wonder we want to get at ’em again?”

The worst part of the wounds is the fearful sepsis and the impossibility of getting them anything like clean.

“First time I’ve had my boots off for seven weeks!” is the kind of exclamation that recurs all day, as we literally cut them off. Hardly any of the boots have been off for three weeks, with the result that they seem glued on, whilst the feet are like iron, the nails like claws.

Some of the men have not had their wounds dressed since the first field dressing was applied, for the simple reason that the rush on the hospital trains makes it impossible to attend to any but the worst cases, many of whom, as it is, are dying of hæmorrhage, accelerated by the jolting on the journey.

There is no time to do anything but the dressings, and if we *did* want to wash the patients there

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is nothing but the red handkerchiefs we hang round the lights for shades by night, for towels by day.

Water, especially boiling water, is at a premium, as it all has to be fetched from outside where the veteran cook stokes hard all day in the driving rain, ladling us out a modicum into each bowl from his cauldrons.

“I never thought to see such sights,” exclaimed a nurse of thirty years’ experience as a new trainload came in. But we have no time to think of our own sensations.

Fingerless hands, lungs pierced, arms and legs pretty well gangrenous, others already threatening tetanus (against which they are now beginning to inoculate patients), mouths swollen beyond all recognition with bullet shots, fractured femurs, shattered jaws, sightless eyes, ugly scalp wounds; yet never a murmur, never a groan except in sleep. As the men come in they fall on their pallets and doze until roused for food.

A few are enraged to madness at the sight of a German.

“They fired on our Red Cross!” they cry. “Burnt every man alive! Why do we treat them so well?”

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Quite a number of prisoners who had been taken near Lille were brought into the clearing station this morning. Being the only linguist present, I was installed as interpreter. They were in a horrible state of nerves, and asked when they were likely to be killed.

One of them was nastily peppered about the heart with shrapnel and asked: "When shall we be shot?" I explained whilst dressing his wounds that Britain is a civilised country, and, in contrast to the Huns, does not hit a man when he is down. Never shall I forget the look of relief on the man's face.

"They told us we'd be tortured if you got us!" he exclaimed.

Later on I was asked to send a card to his mother. It was difficult to know what to say, but "Your son, though a prisoner and wounded, is safe and being well cared for," seemed to meet the occasion. Suddenly without a word he seized the scissors from my belt. Recalling tales of vindictive prisoners, I stepped back. The precaution was unnecessary, for the little Hun was only cutting a button off his coat pocket.

"Hier, Sie haben ja nichts genommen" ("Here, you have not taken anything"), he ex-



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claimed, Teuton boorishness veiling the kindliness as he handed me the "souvenir."

A strangely human incident occurred a little later.

A group of Tommies were watching a Boche having a bayoneted hand dressed. He spoke quite good English, but was apparently too frightened to answer any of their sallies. Presently, however, he turned to me with a request that he might be allowed to send a line to his wife to say he was alive.

"'E's young to 'ave a wife, Sister," suggested a lame man, the maintenance of whose large family apparently proved a burden to him.

"'Ow old are yer? *You ?*" he added, addressing the prisoner.

The Hun pulled out an old letter-case and abstracted the portrait of a pretty English-looking girl in a garden arbour.

"My vife," he exclaimed. "She has seventeen years, I nineteen. Ve was married two days when I come away!"

In a moment the hostile crowd round him was turned to one of sympathisers. "Poor beggar! After all, he probably doesn't want to fight any more than we do," said the lame man.





A WARD IN THE SUGAR-SHED CLEARING STATION



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“No,” replied the prisoner, and all the racial antagonism of Saxon versus Prussian showed itself in his words, “Ve Saxons not want war—ve want peace—but they not ask us!”

*October 31st.* Who could believe, had they not seen for themselves, the manifold horrors of war? The vermin, against which there is no coping, vermin that in ordinary times one never saw. The men are alive with them, so are we, a fact which necessitates a tremendous “search” at every available opportunity. Even amputated limbs are found to be crawling.

The girl who was working single-handed in this barn until we arrived was walking along the quay yesterday when a feeble voice called her from a stretcher. It was her brother. He died in the night, but she is on duty all the same.

All day long the rush continues. The question “Shrapnel or bullet?” rings incessantly in our ears as each man comes up to get his dressing done.

One boy of nineteen had no fewer than six bullet wounds in one arm and two in each leg. It took two of us an hour to dress his wounds, and afterwards, as I washed his beardless face in response to a gentle request, I could scarce refrain

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from sending up a prayer of gratitude that my own brothers are dead and not mutilated like these boys.

Towards sunset I was called to the side of a youthful Saxon already rigid with tetanus.

Through his clenched teeth he could still groan to the orderly's command to lie still: "Ich kann nicht still liegen" ("I can't lie still").

At seven o'clock (after nearly twelve hours' work) we went home to dinner, and, it being our turn to take night shift, were back again at our posts, with clean aprons and a satisfied inner man, two hours later. The orderly officer called for any who had not yet had their second anti-typhoid injection, and I, being one of them, was injected on the spot.

During the long night, as we hurried from patient to patient in the darkened cry-haunted ward, covering the restless sleeping figures, moving them into more comfortable positions, with a prayer for each one's mother, I could screw up no feeling of resentment towards the dying Saxon boy, in spite of the cries of our men, but only against that vile Prussianism that brought up its children to regard rapine and slaughter as a divine necessity. By midnight things were quiet



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enough to allow us to cut up dressings as best we might. By this time, owing to there not being a chair in the place, I confess my legs were almost giving way. Moreover, the injection took speedy effect, and a stiffening arm and rising temperature do not facilitate work of this kind. Frankly, I do not think any of us will ever be as busy again, and our one prayer was for strength to "carry on." Many of the men were tormented by coughs that kept the others awake. All we had to give them was lukewarm water and the rinsings of a condensed milk tin. (For euphony we called it "milk.")

Those who could not sleep for vermin lit cigarette after cigarette until their supply ran out. At 2 A.M. we retired to the nurses' "bunk"—a whitewashed, rat-ridden, ill-smelling partitioned compartment, whose sole furniture consisted of two shelves—until someone was inspired to fetch the "dressing-table" (two empty boxes—oh, joy of joys! upon which we took it in turns to sit)—and a coke fire, on which we boiled eggs for our midnight meal. Half-way through my egg the orderly called me: "The prisoner can't last much longer. Will you come and speak to him, Sister?" It seemed as if the ward were one huge

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battlefield, for cries greeted me on all sides. "Get at 'em, lads!" shouted the burly Scot in the corner as he urged forward his comrades in his sleep. "Christ help us!" groaned an armless dragoon, coming round from the anæsthetic.

I soothed the dying German as best I could when the awful spasms came, and through his clenched teeth he signified the pain in the "kreuz" (small of the back). What could I say but "Guter Junge—bleib still. Es dauert nicht mehr lange!" ("Good boy—lie still. It will not last long now!") With his remaining hand he pressed mine as I wiped the pouring sweat from his brow. After all, suffering is a great leveller.

The orderly, an old South African campaigner, looked at the light that began to flood the sky.

"They usually go West at this hour," he remarked grimly, with a shudder. I shuddered too; the place was alive with spirits.

For a moment we seemed to hear the sigh of the departing, feel the rushing of many wings as they brushed past. Then a gaunt, muffled figure appeared at the door bearing a lantern, for all the world like a hoary figure of "Time," and we awoke to reality.

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"I've brought down a trainload," he said. "A round dozen of them are urgent cases and must have beds."

Perforce we had to shift the sleeping forms on to the concrete floor, all bruised and torn and bleeding though they were, cutting shorter their all too short rest.

An officer was brought in wounded in the abdomen, but cheerfully talking of getting home. He, too, passed away before eight o'clock.

From the nursing point of view the work is most unsatisfactory, as disinfectants, to say nothing of dressings, are continually at low ebb. To-day the iodine ran out. One of the surgeons came round and signified his intention to dress a bad femur case. I had got together what things I could when he called for iodine. There being none to be had, he sighed resignedly, and with "Then we will leave the dressings for the present," walked off, only to return an hour later with a quantity he had found in the town.

Of course there can be no attempt at asepsis in a place so ill ventilated, or, rather, not ventilated at all, for there are no side windows, and, although the skylight is sufficient for lighting

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purposes, the ventilation is effected by means of the excessively draughty entrances.

It is distinctly unhealthy, and the odours in the place are indescribable and never to be forgotten. There is no lavatory accommodation—although latrines are situated along the quay, whither the blind are led by the armless, the lame carried on orderlies' backs.

Refuse of all sorts that cannot be burned in the incinerator is disposed of in the sea, and it is good to note that the sacks of straw are being gradually replaced by *real* beds and the supply of blankets is greatly augmented.

Unsatisfactory, too, from the nursing point of view is the fact—that the men pass through the clearing station so rapidly that we seldom do the same dressing twice; and though there *are* days when, owing to rough seas or overladen boats, we are able to watch the progress of the patients, for the most part it is only the immovable cases that remain, and the rest are hurried through, leaving one wondering how they will get on.

Did I say *hurried* through? There is no need to hurry the men who are to go home, for no sooner is a boat announced than a general scramble ensues, and they will leave their breakfast, cloth-



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ing, even their treasured trophies behind, in order not to be late.

“Just a bit of 'ome, and we'll be twice as strong for the next bit o' fightin',” they say.

There follows the inspection of labels (for each man is labelled for his destination: blue for England, yellow for Havre, white for a convalescent depot), and sad indeed are the faces of those to whom the medical officer has not vouchsafed the coveted blue ticket.

Just as day dawned, with a last spasm, more awful than the others, the little Saxon prisoner died. As his close-clenched jaws relaxed the orderly remarked: “Not bad-looking for a corpse, Sister; must have been a pretty child!”

I asked for his corpse number, but it was not to be found. In my heart I wished the boy's mother could have known he died well cared for.

It is all very primitive; we have no screens to hide what once was mortal from the others.

We came off duty at 10 A.M., just as another batch of 1,100 men began to arrive, and on our way home caught a glimpse of K. of K., who is paying an incognito visit, as he stepped from a destroyer.

## CHAPTER II

November, 1914

*November 1st.* It is impossible to keep note of the daily occurrences. Things move too quickly out here—besides, if the spirit is willing the flesh is very exhausted. Nevertheless, not for a moment do our spirits flag; on the contrary, the worse things grow the more cheerful do we become, the more determined to make the best of things. It is strange that all the years we worked hard to amuse ourselves at home not one brought an eighth of the satisfaction of *this*.

There is a wonderful dearth of utensils, though the store grows larger daily. It is no infrequent occurrence to have to sally out to the nearest chemist to buy air cushions, eye baths, etc., as they are required.

Night, and the wards are full. Another train disgorges its burden. The stretcher cases have to remain on stretchers. The walking cases are

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huddled round the stove, extended on the concrete, their blood-stained, bug-ridden greatcoats for coverings.

Without, for a moment the rain has ceased, and in the clear night the moon smiles peacefully over the silver, gleaming sea.

What a contrast to the scene within! The restless figures of the wounded—the busy nurses.

Everyone is exhausted, for it is an almost superhuman task for seven women to tackle by day and by night; but they say the Army Nursing Service will be here in sufficient numbers soon. The lady doctors have been invaluable, their zeal unflagging. They are splendid operators, and in the midst of the worst rushes never careless. Besides their work here they spend much time at the “Women’s Hospital” at a château some three miles out of Boulogne, where everything is run by volunteer women workers, who act as doctors, nurses, orderlies and quartermasters.

The theatre looks quite smart, with the large sterilisers that have been installed and the operating table. What tales those whitewashed walls could tell!

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

Will those who are knitting away at home ever realise the value of their own handiwork, I wonder?

If they could but see the eager faces of the men as the meagre stores are issued, and they receive those ill-fitting coats, and socks, and cardboard-footed shoes (the nightingales they one and all disdain); could they for a single moment glance at the contented expression of the "movable cases" as they wriggle out of their creeping shirts, so torn, so stiff with congealed blood and stained with Flanders mud, into garments that are both soft and warm, all those hours of patient knitting would be well rewarded; they would know they are not labouring in vain.

In spite of the so-called "Red Cross Store Room" that is being replenished daily by stock drawn from all sources, of course there aren't enough things to go round, and although we grouse at the wise quartermaster's inquiries as to whether each article we need is an imperative necessity or not, in our heart of hearts we know him to be in the right.

A strange thing happened to-day. A man came in with a badly shattered forearm. I dressed





**EXTEMPORISED OPERATING THEATRE AT A  
CLEARING STATION**

"The theatre looks quite smart with the huge sterilisers that have been installed and the operating table"



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it myself, and can vouch for the fact that in other respects he seemed fit enough.

Not long afterwards one of his companions disengaged himself from the group by the stove and came to me, saying : " Sister, that man has gone blind suddenly."

I remarked it must be nonsense, and told him to go to sleep. Nevertheless, on passing a light before the other man's eyes there was never a flicker. He was blind, as the medical officer can vouch; whether it is temporary or not we shall never know, for the cases pass through so quickly.

*November 2nd.* Someone has been asked to volunteer to run the military baths. I, being the one whose work in hospital must be of least value, naturally did so, and was accepted.

*November 3rd.* Most of the men are very subdued, and either loath to talk of what they have been through or ultra-full of reminiscences, many of which have to be taken with a grain of salt.

A large percentage of them stammer or have developed a nervous impediment in their speech,

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owing, no doubt, to the strain of the past months; and this is very often the case in Territorial regiments, whose members were accustomed to a more or less easy life in peace time.

Quite a number of the London Scottish—whose “charge” has been so boomed by the daily papers as a proof of the efficiency of the Territorial Army—are coming down now. They are very annoyed and very ashamed of the fuss that has been made of them.

“We only did what is done by one regiment or another every day,” they said, “and now we hardly like to show our faces for the ridicule that must be cast upon us by the Regulars, who have seen ten times as much fighting and never been mentioned at all.”

The “dum-dum” lie is no lie at all. Anyone who has seen the strangely mutilated limbs can vouch for that. In one case the bullet passed clean through one leg and exploded in the other. Bah! the smell of the gas gangrene—shall we ever forget it?

We hear many tales about the Germans from the men. Devoid of honour, they train machine-guns on ambulances, and accredit us with the same devilish tricks. One French civilian ambulance



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unit was totally destroyed a few days back, and wounded, surgeons, stretcher-bearers and nurses alike were blown to atoms.

*November 7th.* I am now installed as "Lady Superintendent of Military Baths," an entirely new post!

The scene of my activities is the public baths in the Rue des Vieillards, that have been rented from the old proprietress. With six orderlies to do the rough work—the washing of towels, the cleaning of the twenty baths, and my own spacious office in which to do the men's dressings—things are cheerful enough.

About 100 men come through each day—the convalescents in the morning, so that the whole forenoon is taken up with dressings.

The difficulties at first were many, a fact which considerably enhanced the joy of the work.

1. To get the place clean was a veritable *chef-d'œuvre*.

2. Drawing things from the Ordnance is no easy matter. One must not buy what may be drawn; and as I have no notion of what can be drawn there is often considerable delay.

3. Persuading the orderlies that water for

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dressings must be boiled, and not lukewarm, is likewise far from easy.

The days are no longer so strenuous. I arrive at eight to see that the men are getting on with their work, cut up dressings, leave out and mark towels until ten o'clock, when the convalescents begin to arrive.

By 3.30 I am able to go down to the clearing station to write letters for the helpless.

To-day a man who was brought in with a badly fractured pelvis dictated one to his brother. It ran :

“DEAR GEORGE,—After going through all the big battles of Mons, the Marne and the Aisne, I am sad to say I've got hit at last, but hope soon to be home with you all. I'm glad to know you've joined to be a soldier, and hope soon to hear you're helping in the fight.”

“It isn't true, Sister,” he added; “but perhaps it will help him through, poor fellow—if I die!”

Needless to say, none of the hospital personnel have time to sandwich letter-writing for the men in between their medical work, and civilian help is welcome in this matter.

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No one who has not seen the intricacies of the office work of a large military hospital can have the least conception what an amount of forethought, what a number of clerks are involved. The distribution of the wounded into the different wards, the notification and specification of each case — each is an art in itself. Whilst in the quartermaster's domain the drawing of rations for an elastic number of patients, ranging each meal from 50 to 400, is wellnigh stupendous.

And although we who know nothing of these matters have often laughed at the theoretical red tape of the Army, there is no denying that, in working order, it is a thing to be venerated rather than scoffed at.

*November 8th, On the Ramparts of Boulogne.* After the hush of the unornamental cathedral the soft autumn breezes out here are refreshing. Even in the well ventilated baths the pungent smell of segregated humanity permeates. What a strange place is Boulogne now, the city of hospitals, every hotel a hospital, every road thronged with troops and nurses!

Yesterday I had a slight fracas with my corporal, a nice but utterly untrained boy, who

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has a way of wandering into the office, cigarette in mouth.

Now, there is no law in the Army, so far as I can make out, that compels an orderly to pay the slightest respect toward a nurse. He must stand at attention when addressed by a junior subaltern, but may loll and smoke at his ease whilst taking a nursing sister's orders. Thus it seems that from time immemorial a slight antagonism has reigned, for the men are apt to take advantage of a woman, who, unless she have infinite tact, often enough finds things hard.

However, after two cups of black coffee to give me the requisite courage, I faced the little difficulty boldly. "Corporal," I suggested, "it doesn't matter what you do outside, but I would rather you didn't smoke in the office. You set the example to the others, who are beginning to turn the office into a sort of smoking-room. Besides, it isn't usual in the Service, is it?"

There was an awkward silence, as the poor boy blushed and grunted. Then I changed the subject, and think all will be well, for though surly in manner he is most anxious to please.

One afternoon I was asked to go and speak



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to some prisoners at the Imperial (No. — General Hospital), where Miss A—— is now working. A young “Freiwillige” of 19 immediately inquired: “What about Paris?”

“What do you mean?” I asked, astonished.

“When did we take it?” was the somewhat surprising reply.

On the whole, in spite of the rigorous discipline that makes it necessary for German officers to go behind their men to save their own skins and goad on their victims; in spite of the fact that they seem to be treated like cattle and have been found chained to their machine-guns, as a whole (and probably as the outcome of the patriotism that is inculcated into every German from his earliest days) they seem loyal to their superiors; and, relieved though they appear at being captured, are not garrulous on the score of the reign of terrorism from which they have escaped. For not the most warlike can covet the privilege of being driven in massed formation, over heaped-up corpses, into the face of the enemy's fire that literally mows them down like hay. It turns even our own machine-gun men sick.

As we were about to turn in, ten funerals went up without even an escort, as the R.A.M.C.

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orderlies are too engrossed with their duties towards the living to be spared.

So die the flower of English manhood! Buried in their deal boards in French clay, with only a French grave-digger or two and a cluster of children playing round the massive gates to see them to their last resting-place.

Well might the bells of Shoreditch peal, muffled, on All Saints' Day!

*November 9th.* The autumn leaves are falling. Before me sit a group of convalescents in the courtyard, basking in what there is of mellow sunlight—awaiting their turn for baths. To say they look dejected is too mild. There is a look of weariness in their eyes that appals one. There is no mistaking a man from the front. They all have it—the trench-haunted look.

“Any man who says he *wants* to go back is a liar,” say most. “It isn’t fighting; it’s murder, you see.” And one is left all the more astounded at the heroism with which they face the inevitable when it comes to returning to the front, the unanimity of their: “Are we down-hearted? *Never!*” as they march off.

On the whole there is wonderfully little

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“swinging the lead” or “dodging the column,” as the men themselves call malingering; and though some of the medical officers were apt to look upon the early cases of trench feet as much ado about nothing, it has since been found that the acutest pain is often present when all swelling has subsided.

It is a relief to get back in the evenings to the society of the nurses. Many of them already look knocked up. “Fifty patients on my floor, and only two orderlies,” says one. And at home thousands of trained workers are waiting for work.

We often wonder that no use is made of the members of the Voluntary Aid Detachments as probationers under the trained nurses. True, in their present stage of efficiency (or inefficiency, for what are a number of first-aid lectures or stretcher drills as compared with the real hospital training?) many of them might prove more of a hindrance than a help in an emergency. Nevertheless, they could be of as much use as probationers out here—where, everything having been improvised, the inconveniences necessitate much extra labour—as they could be at home.

It is ridiculous to imagine that V.A.D.’s, with their theoretical experience, are competent

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to run hospitals by themselves; it is equally ridiculous to allow the valuable qualified nurses to run themselves to death, doing jobs an untrained woman can do, instead of utilising the many eager workers willing to take over the menial work.\*

It will not be hard to sift the wheat from the chaff, the seekers after sensation from the genuine workers. For there is no romance in the work of a hospital, no jaunts to battlefields bearing cups of water to the dying, no soothing of pillows and holding the hands of patients; but ten to twelve hours each day occupied in the accomplishment of tasks so menial that one would hesitate to ask a servant to perform them.

*November 10th.* We awaken to bugle calls, we fall asleep to the sound of tramping feet. Oh, that long weary high road into the jaws of death! The sudden evacuation of Boulogne seems less imminent now than it did, though the German advance on Calais continues. Now that England has declared war on Turkey, we realise how little of the big scheme of things we see in our niche. Sometimes, between waking and sleeping, a vision

\* This has since been done, and members of Voluntary Aid Detachments are now used extensively in France as probationers in military hospitals where they come under direct War Office control.



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of home comes back to me, of soft carpets and steaming hot baths, and everywhere clean linen and creature comforts and ease. After all, I should like to end my days as I began them—in luxury.

*November 11th.* No wonder Boulogne is full to overflowing. No wonder the little out-of-the-way cafés have taken on something of the glamour and *éclat* of Rumpelmayer or the Ritz. No wonder everyone who can afford to be is in France. One feels it in the air, it is the Real Thing; one is no longer a looker-on, but a moving factor of things who can afford to pity those at home whose activities have not yet had occasion to be called into play.

The town itself consists of the Haute Ville enclosed by massive thirteenth century ramparts flanked by round towers, whose history for years centred round Godfrey de Bouillon, and the four celebrated gates (Porte Gayole, Porte des Dunes, Porte de Calais and Porte des Degrés). Crowning all stands the Cathédrale de Notre Dame, whose dome from the distance, whether viewed from the town or the envioning country, brings back faint remembrances of St. Peter's in the Holy City.

There is nothing of great artistic interest or

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value to be found within (unless it be the seventh century antiquities in the crypt), but the spirit of earnest devotion that characterises all Catholic places of worship, uniting every worshipper and raising the lowliest edifice to equality with the most ambitious building, is more marked here than in any church I have yet visited. The reverence of the bare-headed peasants, holding up their woollen shawls as coverings for their heads, of the shambling wounded, of the smart *mondaines*, is alike worthy of those Russian allies who recognise no sin greater than lack of veneration to their God.

The legend of the miraculous statue of Our Lady of Boulogne, as depicted in a picture over the altar of the chapel in the cathedral, dates back to the year 636. In that year a strange boat, radiating with light, was seen to enter the harbour, propelled by some miraculous power and devoid of sailors or pilot. When the excited population reached the shore it was to find on the bridge of the barque a beautifully carved image of the Holy Virgin carrying the infant Jesus, beside which lay a silver-bound copy of the Scriptures.

Over the spot that marked the miraculous image's first resting-place in the Haute Ville the oft-destroyed cathedral has grown, and although,

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after many vicissitudes, the Holy Statue was finally destroyed during the eighteenth century Reign of Terror, many are the pilgrimages still made to the solitary relic of the holy image—a hand that was cut off prior to the burning, which is preserved in a gilt heart, suspended from the new statue.

The fame of its miracles spread abroad so widely that not only did kings and princes hasten to pay homage, but some unscrupulous priests at St. Cloud attracted large numbers of pilgrims by trafficking in the public faith and maintaining that *they* were in possession of the miraculous statue. Hence the name of the Bois de Boulogne in Paris, and the fact that the image is known as Our Lady of Boulogne-sur-Mer.

Beyond Notre Dame runs the Calais—St. Omer road which has seen so much bloody traffic in the past and may see so much more in a few days.

Guns, ammunition convoys and ambulances rumble along it ceaselessly by day and night, pausing only to answer the challenge of the sentries posted at intervals at every cross-road of importance. The ruined Jesuit monastery lies along this road, alive with wounded Indians, who, when



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convalescent, are shifted into the outlying tents that form the Convalescent Depot.

Only about one mile away on the same road stands the Colonne de la Grande Armée, that huge Doric column surmounted by the figure of Napoleon, erected to commemorate the expedition against England and commenced 110 years ago, when Marshal Soult (as the inscription on the base tells us) laid the first stone in the presence of the whole army.

Walking townwards one comes across the fisher village built in tier upon tier of squalid, unsanitated streets, as odorous as the Naples of ten years ago—and as picturesque; and pinnaced by St. Pierre-des-Marins, whose lofty fourteenth century Gothic spire is one of the few architectural beauties to be found here, and whose interior, so full of votive offerings, witnesses the toll of *matelot* lives exacted yearly by the sea from those who would snatch their living from her.

Crowning all stands the revered Calvary to which all wise fishermen pray as they sail in and out of the harbour.

From here the panorama of the whole place is laid bare, the *jetées*, the coast, the Gare Maritime, the Bassin Loubet, the River Liane winding in and





“THE REVERED CALVARY TO WHICH ALL WISE FISHERMEN PRAY”



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out of the valley and losing itself finally in the mists; and nearer, the gay flower-market and the Halle des Poissons, where the vendors, almost as soon as the nets of herrings are unladen, are rid of what fish they can get in these troublous times, when every man who is not fighting is trawling for mines.

*November 12th.* As I sit beside the dying embers of my office fire, in which great valleys and gorges are discernible in the glowing coal and a mountainous summit capped by a fairy castle, I wonder what happiness there is to equal the fire-side that one has earned oneself.

It might almost be home (after all, all fires, like all winds and sunshine, or thunder and rain, are consolingly the same!), only instead of soft pile carpets and arm-chairs I have a packing-case for seat and an inverted saucepan on my knee for table. Instead of flowers, the trestled table is adorned with bandages and bottles of lotion and packets of dressings.

Instead of a gong to announce "dressing time," and soft *décolletée* frocks donned before long mirrors, and well-appointed dining-tables and the announcement that "Dinner is served," there

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are only the promptings of my hungry inside to tell me mealtime is due, and it would be as well to scrub up, remove the mackintosh apron, and smooth my hair under the unbecoming white cap before the dinner is gobbled up !

Yet, until one has worked five hours to earn five minutes' rest, one does not know the meaning of leisure.

Until one has felt the clinging of the helpless hand, or run to the call of a feeble voice, one does not know the greatest of all joys—the joy of service.

The rapidity with which the Gare Maritime Hospital is developing is marvellous. Instead of wallowing to our ankles in a slush of disinfectant and rain-water, the wards are well swept, with two strips of cheery red carpet on either side. Instead of boards and blankets, some 200 real beds have been installed, with sheets of coarse calico and pillows. Instead of empty crates (and those at a premium) there are chairs, whilst towels supplant the red handkerchiefs which now hang desolately from the lamps by night *and* day.

Just at present the casualty ward, in which an emergency operation theatre has been opened, is lying empty, so are the other wards. One wonders



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why? The truth is, things are looking fairly bad. The enemy is only forty-five miles from Calais and still presses on to the goal. There is a rumour that the Germans are through the lines everywhere, that we have no men to send (though the French are supposed to be reinforcing) until the 8th Division of "K's" untrained army comes out, and the evacuation of Boulogne is imminent. We are told to be prepared to leave at a minute's notice, for once through the lines the enemy can march here unmolested. Despite the violent storm, all the wounded whom it is possible to move have been sent home (an ominous fact, for their removal should betoken an advance on our part), and still the ambulance trains come back from the front empty. A pestilential battle rages at Arras; Dixmude has fallen (yes, several of the Censor's censors have been dismissed for letting us know this!) A hundred questions assail us. Will the hopeless cases have to be left behind? What will be done to the many millions' worth of stores in this spy-ridden place?

Heaven knows! We can but "wait and see."

We are lost in amazement at the lukewarmness of the masses at home who do not seem to realise the significance of this move.

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But let me return to No. — Stationary Hospital, where the staff is greatly augmented and Army nurses work side by side with those of the Red Cross.

If there is some slight friction between the two it is easily understood, for how can the newly arrived Army sisters be expected to find in a dirty, evil-smelling barn anything but the violation of all the laws of hygiene? Whereas to those Red Cross sisters, who have built it up with their life's blood, so to speak, who have watched it evolve under their weary fingers, it is a place of supreme beauty and first importance.

If there is some slight friction amongst the authorities, too, it is soon explained. For it is as much the duty of the Red Cross to cherish its own rights as it is for the Army to centralise and control, at a time like this, every existing institution to prevent the misuse of public funds.

Both are in the right.

At home no one seemed quite to realise the exact position of the Red Cross and the various Army medical services. Out here, except that a distinct antagonism between the two organisations prevails, the position is equally vague.

The British Red Cross Society and the St.

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John Ambulance Association were originally formed to supplement the requirements of the military and naval medical services in war time, thus obviating the expense of keeping up an exceptionally large staff in days of peace. On this understanding the War Office took nominal control of the various B.R.C.S. enterprises, supervising the First Aid examinations and keeping a register of all its members. The value of that registration of B.R.C.S. members by the War Office is not quite obvious at present, for the War Office appears to disclaim all responsibility for the Red Cross. There are even rumours that a large portion of its personnel is to be greatly reduced and eventually sent from the base. In fact, no one's work or position is clearly defined.

The work of the Royal Army Medical Corps, the Nursing Service, "Q.A.I.M.N.S.," Reserve, Indian and Territorial, was well defined enough. Field ambulances, clearing stations, stationary hospitals (so-called because they are movable!) and base hospitals were their sphere, and vaguely it was understood that the Voluntary Aid Detachments were destined for use with the Territorial Forces.

Then, when at the outbreak of hostilities there



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came the call for more workers, many doctors and fully-trained nurses, anxious to get to that mysterious and alluring unknown, the Front, threw up their good posts and sold their patiently built-up practices in order to join the Red Cross.

Many of them are already regretting their impetuosity. Not only the members of the Voluntary Aid Detachments, who have hitherto played at work under War Office supervision and with War Office sanction, but the much-needed trained nurses and doctors (many of them specialists of the first order) find themselves somewhat shelved, oftentimes deprived of the best surgical work by those of their juniors who had had the foresight or good luck to join the Reserve or Territorials instead of a volunteer concern whose position is, as yet, indefinite and whose scope, so far, limited. Many even find themselves on the Reserve Staff and waiting for work. A certain restlessness that prevails amongst these is easily explained, for it is not always possible to console oneself with the idea that inaction is merely a respite and preparation for the next call upon one's energies, when that call is lying all around in understaffed hospitals.



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*November 13th.* Perhaps it was the unconquerable instinct to help lame dogs over stiles that prompted the Matron to ask after some German literature for a prisoner whose two legs had been amputated. I, as linguist and jack-of-all-trades, was deputed to forage for Hun books, and, for the first time, found my conversance with the language a matter of embarrassment rather than of pride.

As I entered the French bookseller's, and asked for what I wanted, the girl eyed me with suspicion. Then, "We are not pro-German," she said with *hauteur*.

Fearful to return, my mission unaccomplished, I tried shop after shop.

"You can climb on that ladder and see for yourself," said a young girl, pointing to a high ladder and daring me up it with her scornful eyes. I unearthed and returned with an old paper-backed novel for the prisoner, with a heavy heart, wondering if I was unpatriotic to have carried out my orders—but the legless man had died in the meantime.

Such is the spirit of France—vengeance on a ruthless, untrustworthy enemy.

Such the spirit of England, maybe hyper-quixotic—never to hit a man when he is down.

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*November 15th.* Last night Lord Roberts died. The little wrinkled old man, who only a week ago was in our midst, walking round our wards, cheering on the wounded, encouraging the Indians, has finished as he began, in the sphere of action.

*November 17th.* This morning the mail boat is accompanied by six French destroyers. In the town all flags are flying half-mast; in the station are massed guards, French, English, Indian. The Sikhs are fine-looking specimens of humanity, and objects of great interest to the peasants who crowd round exchanging souvenirs. The smaller hillmen look as if they would be very formidable foes, though at present many of them lie curled up asleep on sacks, and covered with sacks, as peacefully as children.

*Later.* After the coffin of the great little man, who has, alas! lived to see his worst fears for his country realised, had been borne on board, we went to look at the armoured train that is in hospital. A strange, formidable-looking thing, too, is this vehicle of destruction, daubed with many-hued, very futuristic patches, and guarded by sentries.



LORD ROBERTS'S FUNERAL: THE SCENE ON THE QUAY





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A large legend announced the train's destination as "Berlin," whilst great guns, daubed with their appropriate names, "Homeless Hector" and "Weary Willie," pointed their inquiring noses innocuously at the sky.

This, we were told, was the armoured train which, under Commander Samson's guidance, played such havoc with the enemy and caused the Kaiser to put a price worth having on that gallant officer's head.

*November 23rd.* The baths closed most suddenly and unexpectedly last night. The owners' exorbitant demands for money—damages for towels which we have not even used, walls, ceilings, windows, etc., that are in the same good repair as when we came—have made it imperative to commandeer the place or, to avoid friction and expense, erect new ones.

After the Major and his interpreter driver (a dentist who volunteered his services) had spent nearly two hours haranguing Madame and her *homme d'affaires*, we cleared the place out.

Snow fell for the first time during the night, and it is freezing so hard this morning that the hot

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water thrown over the stones outside for cleansing purposes becomes ice at once.

Having a free day, I explored the place from Le Portel, the quaint little fishing village where fishwives, with their wide, hooped skirts, their quaint poke bonnets or characteristic snowy white headgear and clogs, predominate, to the St. Pierre quarter, cobbled like the new town itself, but built in tier after tier of terraces, characterised by an indescribable, if picturesque, squalor and dirt.

Everywhere we are followed by children begging for "souvenirs." I wonder what the state of our clothes would be had we cut off a uniform button for each one who asked!

The tide is high up over the front to-day. Ambulances and cars are held up on the Wimereux road. It is a wonderful sight, the big waves rolling over the main road, whilst venturesome drivers who run the gauntlet find their cars immovable in three feet of water and subject to the ungentle washing of the sea.

*November 24th.* Being on night duty with a private patient who is so restless that neither of us gets a minute's peace, I am having an excellent opportunity of observing things as they are; and,



AMBULANCES HELD UP BY THE HIGH TIDE





## November, 1914

after all, there is plenty to be noted that will never be brought to light.

*November 29th.* In the morning when one comes off duty, full of anticipation of the exhilarating morning walk, the joy of the clear, cold sea air, there are usually plenty of odd jobs to be done. At present we are engaged in making sandbags for those hospitals which are destitute of them. In this we have the assistance of two small French Boy Scouts who, having noticed us staggering under the load of our baskets, volunteered to find a wheelbarrow and bring us up a certain quantity of sand every morning.

## CHAPTER III

**December, 1914**

*December 2nd.* They say that the Germans have been finally driven back, that our men are enjoying a rest from the trenches, that many officers have gone home on forty-eight hours' leave.

Converted motor-buses with boarded windows, all of steel-grey hue, come down with loads of cheery though exhausted men on their way home.

Most of the cases in hospital are now medical, rheumatism and the newest disease, "trench feet," which was at first identified as frost-bite. Each medical officer has a different method for treating it. Most wrap the limbs in cotton-wool, but the agony the men go through whilst "thawing" is awful. Many feet are already gangrenous and have to be amputated.

They are again clearing out, which leads us to expect a big battle.

Rumour has it that Belgrade has fallen to the Austrians.

December, 1914

*December 6th.* Yesterday morning, having for some weeks back collected with great avidity all kinds of comforts for the men, I took my goods up to the convalescent camp that stands on the hill by the Calais road. We obtained a lift in an ambulance and wallowed in the indescribable mud at the camp. It had been a frightful night. Hail, wind, thunder, lightning, blinding rain—the elements let loose! Several of the tents were down, and the men shivered as they ambled about their light fatigue work. The condition of the convalescents is pitiable. They grabbed things like so many wild beasts; indeed, they had the look of weary wild beasts in their eyes.

I don't know which were the more acceptable—cigarettes or old papers. The former to soothe their racked nerves and warm them up in the tempestuous weather, the latter to divert their attention, momentarily at least, from their own sufferings. Undoubtedly the illustrated journals are most useful. The men seem unable to concentrate their attention on anything not pictorial.

We took them knitted things too—and even our own body belts and gloves were requisitioned in the vain effort to make our gifts go round, and we came home with hands stiff with cold.

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

*December 8th.* In the afternoon we were allowed a glimpse at the Indian camp, where, after seeing the wards, conspicuous for their neatness and order and the lack of nurses (all Indian hospitals are staffed, needless to say, by orderlies), we were entertained for tea in the officers' mess.

It was a picturesque sight, that tent lighted by two smoky oil-lamps, by the light of which four doctors were playing cards as we entered.

As we sat over the camp fire of glowing coals in a perforated bucket such as night watchmen warm their hands by in the raw London mornings, a sudden squall arose, threatening to bring the tent down. One felt like part of an Arctic expedition at the overhead crash, the icy blast, and could not help surmising as to the thoughts of the Indians at the caprices of the European climate as their great, wistful eyes rested on the barren fields.

The tales of their pluck, recuperative powers, and apparent imperviousness to pain are astounding. The medical officers told us that it is almost impossible to keep them in bed. No sooner are they round from an anæsthetic than they are up and smoking, quite oblivious of an amputated limb!



December, 1914

*December 12th, 2 a.m.* A dark, starless morning, and we have just arrived back from Dunkirk. The road to Calais, when we left twelve hours ago, was fairly plain sailing.

There were the barriers to pass (some fifteen between Boulogne and Dunkirk) where the "laissez-passer," describing car, occupants, destination and object of visit, etc., has to be shown; and in between we scorched along at top speed, thankful for the fact that there is no speed limit in France, and getting frozen through and through despite our furs and rugs.

After Calais things grew more interesting. For the first time entrenchments, barbed-wire defences and guns hove in sight, whilst here and there the desolate stretches of country were relieved by figures against the skyline—old women working in the fields, or a solitary picket of soldiers.

We drew into Dunkirk about four o'clock; each of us had different business to transact; the four men on Red Cross work, I on a visit to Lady S——, in charge of a Belgian hospital.

Incidentally, there were the streets and houses to visit, destroyed only yesterday by German bombs. A miserable spectacle they were, the skeleton ruins in the pouring rain; no less miser-

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

able-looking than we, covered in the thick Flanders mud that defied all efforts to keep it out of the car.

It was almost dinner-time when we found ourselves at the C—— Hotel, and, whilst the men were sipping their vermouth, we noticed a man busily engaged in what *seemed* to be letter- but what *proved* to be leader-writing. He introduced himself as C——, the *Daily Mail* correspondent whose articles adorn the central pages of that paper.

Truly the path of the war correspondents of to-day lies along no bed of roses! Eyed with suspicion by the authorities, forced to change their abode daily, they lead the life of veritable refugees.

The dining-room was a fine sight, as by degrees it filled up, each table resplendent with Belgian, French or British uniforms; and we were loath to leave the warm hotel for the blinding rain without. Whilst waiting for the car Mr. C—— entertained us at the piano; anything we asked for he played—rag-time, opera, comedy, classical music. And the last sound, rendered more beautiful by means of his exquisite touch, that greeted us as we passed into the night was the haunting Barcarolle from the *Tales of Hoffmann*.

December, 1914

It was at Gravelines that we lost our way, at about ten o'clock. It was pitch dark. Nowhere a light visible, only the powerful acetylene head-lamps of the car. We tried to find the main road and instead found ourselves back in the town. We made another effort, but failed. We aroused the inhabitants of a house where there seemed to be a red glow behind the closed shutters.

"Tout droit," they told us.

We went "tout droit," and found ourselves back again. We fetched out the proprietor of a hopeful-looking bar.

"Tout droit," he said. This time we ran into a barrier, and only just escaped being shot by the Belgian sentry.

"Back into the town—and tout droit," were his directions. We got back. There seemed no difficulty about *that*. We hammered in vain at a door. Judging by the noise, we succeeded in arousing every dog in the neighbourhood, but not a human being came to our rescue. More wild spurts! Yet it was not until some two hours later that we found ourselves on a broad road, which proved to be the right one. But our troubles were not at an end even then, for the driver, by this time, was in such a state of exasperation that he

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

vowed nothing in the world would persuade him to go farther than Calais. "It's like driving in the sea!" he grumbled, as in truth it was, for the mud was literally flowing over the floor of the car, and our condition was indescribable.

Eventually, by means of much persuasion, not untinged by bribery, he was prevailed upon to finish the journey, throughout which he maintained for the most part a surly silence, interpolated only by semi-audible remarks about the folly of English people who *would* travel in all weathers.

*December 13th.* It is now necessary for every worker in the hospitals to have a permit. It is time, too, for many are the rumours of spies who have crept in and gleaned valuable information from the wounded.

A word about the position of volunteer workers. There is no denying that in the early days, before the staff of the Army hospitals was up to the full strength required by the extraordinary demands of modern warfare, they did an immense amount of good. But a plea must be put in for the central organisation, which has been effected so wonderfully by those in charge.

One by one the hospitals run by well-meaning



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but little experienced women are vanishing or coming under War Office control. One by one free-lance workers brought to the scene of action by motives of patriotism or curiosity are being banished to their proper sphere or sent home.

It is very hard on them, one realises, after they have given so much, yet, hard though it may be, it is but one of the lesser evils of war.

The position of those members of the Voluntary Aid Detachments still here is precarious to the last degree.

They have been relegated to rest station and canteen work where, in the disused railway trucks they have rigged out so well as kitchens and emergency dressing-rooms, they administer to the wounded on the trains by day and night, veritable angels of mercy, as the men say. Yet none of them is allowed to do hospital work. One cannot help wondering that the authorities do not utilise them as probationers under trained nurses instead of using up the strength of the qualified workers in menial jobs. But apparently the law out here is "scrap and discard," which may be a good motto for Ford cars, but seems somewhat hard on human beings.

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

*December 17th.* The news of the bombardment of Scarborough, the wholesale slaughter of women and children, which has just come through, must be greatly gratifying to the Germans!

We wonder if it will bring the reality of war home to the people of England.

*December 18th.* The craving for music, for something to relieve the tension, is almost unbearable. Fortunately, the French attitude towards piano playing has slightly relaxed lately; they no longer stand agape at the idea of overwrought nurses enjoying a few simple songs, and we have been able to hire some well-worn copies of popular tunes to strum on the exceedingly out-of-tune piano. What we lack in music we are repaid for by the picturesqueness of Boulogne. Here stand a batch of khaki Tommies surrounded by an admiring group of French children. "Eengleesh soldyer," they cry gleefully, clinging to the men's arms and not to be moved until some souvenir has been obtained, a button, a hat badge, a cigarette-end. Along the front, the incessant tramp of feet by day and night, recruits, young conscripts full of life and enthusiasm, squads of more sombre men who have already received their baptism of fire,

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trams laden with Army and Red Cross nurses, the former in their ugly red capes so successfully devised by Florence Nightingale to hide the human form divine.

The stormy nights, too, are very beautiful, when one may watch the searchlights catching the crested waves, until the sea seems alight with a myriad lightships.

The papers tell us of the appointment of Prince Hussein Kamel Pasha as Sultan of Egypt. It seems such a wonderfully clever diplomatic coup that it drives all thoughts of our surroundings from our minds.

*December 19th.* Such a pretty kettle of fish ! and one which nothing but a miracle can remedy. No doubt in every big enterprise there are to be found unscrupulous men who, in default of a supervising and restraining hand, will omit to administer public funds with the same thrift that they would their own. Thus, in reply to accusations of extravagance levelled at the Society, the British Red Cross in Boulogne have decided to retrench. Alas ! that the originators of the scheme have no sense of humour or justice.

In spite of the fact that the nurses are the only



## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

people who are working at anything like full pressure out here, they have received a notice that calmly brushes aside the very one-sided six months' contract under which they came out (for, unlike the Army Nursing Sisters who, besides their pay, receive allowances and war gratuities after active service, sick pay if their health is impaired, and a pension if disabled, the British Red Cross nurses agreed to demand no redress if disabled on active service), to the effect that on January 1st the Joint War Committee has decided to lower their fees from £2 2s. to the unprofessional sum of £1, and those who are not agreeable to this breach of contract may consider themselves dismissed.

Thus, at the New Year, 300 fully trained women, most of whom have relinquished highly responsible positions in order to come out, are faced with the alternative of accepting barely a living wage (for £1 minus  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. and 10 per cent. co-operating percentage and minor weekly expenses is little enough for those who have the future to consider), or returning home, only to find their posts filled.

The arguments for this breach of contract are specious though unconvincing, the reasons given being :



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1. "A desire to have as much as possible available for the sick and wounded."

2. "To remove the 'injustice' from the St. John nurses, who have in the past been receiving less than one-half the salary paid to other nurses."

But then, why did the authorities draw up a contract by which the Red Cross refused voluntary workers, whilst the Order of St. John accepted gratuitous services from those who could afford to render them? Yes, both the arguments are excellent; but one cannot help asking why the small body of nurses who have spent years in training, and who are dependent on their earnings, are the only body to suffer by the new economies, whilst a number of orderlies continue to draw salaries higher than those of the qualified nurses. What, too, of the high salaried officials, of the untrained dressers, until recently earning £2 per week and gaining experience in the wards (this experience being counted in their studies)? Above all, what of the principle of this breach of contract, the signing of invalid documents?

But these, after all, are minor details, and one must survey the work of the British Red Cross Society *in toto*. The true tale of these mistakes will never be told, for the blunders of a few indi-

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

viduals will no doubt be wiped away by the memory of the great achievements of the institution in equipping hospitals, making good deficiencies in the regular supplies, and supplementing those supplies by little luxuries whose absence on a bed of pain is a real privation.

There is no denying that what the Red Cross lacks in organisation it makes up for in generosity, as many a patient could tell, many a hospital testify; and, all things considered, is it in any way less well organised than other institutions in this chaotic zone, in these chaotic times, where only the unforeseen seems to occur, and where the duplication of authority is so bewildering that it is almost an impossibility to lay one's finger on the man responsible for any particular department?

*December 24th.* If no one else has benefited by the war, certainly the Boulogne shopkeepers cannot complain! Never in the annals of their existence have they flourished so well. Prices have been forced up, not only in accordance with the laws of supply and demand, but for the benefit of the influx of the rich and influential foreigners, who consider it beneath their dignity to bargain.



A MEAL AT THE INDIAN CAMP



INDIAN ENCAMPMENT IN THE SNOW





December, 1914

One so often hears officers complaining of how they are "rooked" out here instead of receiving the consideration of war prices. It is a pity that, in a country where bargaining is the order of the day, and successful bargaining is regarded as an art to be envied and emulated, we do not view the matter more broadmindedly, for this ignorance of racial differences is apt to lead to misunderstanding.

On another score the French have the upper hand. Why don't we have conscription? they ask. *We* wonder too, but the people at home don't seem to take things seriously.

I had occasion to take down some casks of oranges to the — Barracks, a kind of auxiliary convalescent camp, where the "BX," or unfit men, live in a large concrete island swimming in the mud. The ambulance man who drove me groaned and swore vociferously at the number of whole-skinned youths "swanking" about the base.

"Why aren't they in the trenches?" he asked. "On our convoy we've nothing but men who have been refused for the Army. I've only been in Boulogne six hours (he was going on leave), and I'm disgusted with it all!"

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

*December 26th.* Christmas Day dawned the coldest, whitest Christmas anyone could wish for. The little church was packed for morning service, in spite of the fact that most of us had been to midnight mass at St. Nicholas, a service more noteworthy for the crowded congregation who surge unceasingly in their efforts to get to the fore than for any particular beauty or fervour.

All the afternoon we worked hard at concerts in the hospital and soldiers' institute, where I acted as accompanist. No doubt one day we shall grow accustomed to war, but I own that the crowded wards of the vast barn of men (whose hearty applause and cheery choruses covered the deficiencies of the performance), the uniforms, the white caps, the cheerfulness born of the determination to make the best of the abnormal circumstances, struck me as a never-to-be-forgotten thing. And in every hospital it is the same.

The men are all hung like Christmas trees with their presents, which they treasure as mementoes of this memorable year. Nor have the nurses been forgotten, and the little fur-lined cape sent to each one by H.M. Queen Alexandra is a gift that could not be bettered; for it is bitterly cold, with the damp cold that is a far greater tax upon one's

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powers of endurance than a crisp frost, and furs are a great luxury, as all the men glorying in their new sheepskin coats can testify.

It was not till nearly nine that our work ceased and we got any dinner at all, the midday meal having been cut out for a rehearsal.

*December 29th.* It was very impressive, the Seymour Hicks concert, to which some twenty of us were bidden. It took place in a large shed on the Quai du Bassin, which a pile of empty baskets and an occasional turnip prove to have been a vegetable market in other days.

The stage, built up of a stack of trestle tables, was ornamented with flags.

Looking round from our front seats at the 2,000 eager faces behind, there was a feeling of awe in our hearts as we realised how much devolved on us as representatives of our countrywomen out here.

Rain and hail beat down. The performance began. To our unaccustomed ears it was like a dream.

Of a sudden, an extra gust brought down the light wire and we were in blackness. The C.O. shouted that no men were to leave their seats, and



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the pianist played some of their own songs, to which they sang. Oh, how they sang, their deep voices threatening to bring the roof off!

In after years it will be interesting to note the music of 1914, the rise and wane of "Tipperary" and "Sister Susie" and a hundred other popular songs that have made life cheery for our warriors.

By the light of two carriage lamps the performance was finished, and, as we filed out, the men pressed forward to shake hands with nurses and artists indiscriminately, with a "Thank 'ee kindly——"

What a night! Hail and wind, thunder and rain, rockets and guns, the beat, beat, beat on the panes, the howling, the whistling of the wind, the clouds scurrying across the sky, the incessant noise without, the awful cold within. Above my bed the ceiling has nearly fallen in, whilst buckets act as receptacles for the rain in no fewer than three places. And dare we complain, whilst our men are in the trenches? - Never!

The success of the concert makes one realise the tension at which we are living, makes one wish that something could be done to relieve it—a cinema opened, weekly concerts, etc., organised for the benefit of those who are working, as well as



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for the wounded, in order to make life more normal.

After all, it is as injurious to live at this highly strung pitch as it is to exist on a grey level, and "Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die" is not the spirit that makes for endurance in war or peace.

*December 31st.* A miracle *has* occurred, for the protest lodged by the Red Cross nurses has been heard, a compromise arrived at by which the original contract is to be fulfilled. Let their stand, which was not effected without much determination and hard work on the part of the leaders, be recorded as one of the first women's trade unions.

So ends 1914. God grant that the New Year may bring us Peace, or, if not Peace, the strength to play our parts in the great game worthily of our men!



**BOOK II**

**1915**

**Order Out of Chaos**





## CHAPTER IV

**January, 1915**

*January 8th.* If Art be Selection, then surely is that of keeping a War Diary, that shall be true, unbiased and yet not dull, the hardest of all Arts!

For our eyes are so focused on the smaller things out here that we are apt to ignore the larger issues altogether.

Yet—even as, looking back at bygone years, it is the little things that count—the branch that taps against the study window, the sickly scent of lime trees, the odd pattern on the nursery cup, the wind across the fields, the broken doll, so is it by little things alone that we can draw true pictures of our own times.

The days have been too busy collecting “woollies” for those who need them, getting together a library for the “BX” men, writing letters for the wounded, to keep my diary.

There is much humour as well as pathos in the

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

letters that are dictated, and hackneyed phrases, such as "Hoping this finds you as it leaves me" and "I take up the pen to tell you," recur frequently, often with ambiguous meanings.

"Dear Wife,—You will be glad to hear that I have lost an arm, but am still alive and hope to be home with you soon. Hoping this finds you as it leaves me, Yours Truly, A. S.," ran one I took down to-day.

One is reminded of the anecdote of the man who, when asked if he had ever been in love, replied: "In love? Of course, my dear sir, on many occasions, and each time with the same unswerving devotion," when, as is not infrequently the case, one man contrives to keep up an apparently parallel correspondence with that portion of the community whom he designates as his "Lidy friends," and, equally oblivious of amanuensis and censor, dispatches missives, identical in expressions of passionate devotion, to each of the respective recipients. Romance, too, ripens quickly out here, and each of the aforementioned five happy damsels who was "My dear Miss X" a week ago becomes "My darling sweetheart" to-day. One wonders what will happen to the remaining four when, in due course, the returning hero decides

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upon which of the unsuspecting maidens to bestow his comprehensive heart!

One day I went over to see some friends at Calais, where they are leading the same gendarme-hunted life as the Dunkirk journalist, in order to be near their Belgian fiancés. Every three days they have to change their quarters, and though it is only a fortnight ago that I received their invitation, it was only after inquiring at four hotels that I ran them to earth.

Calais is feeling very thrilled at her own importance, for the enemy are bombing her with a vigour that marks her as a foe worthy of attention.

The attitude of the French towards the Belgians, whose headquarters lie here, is less enthusiastic than ours; indeed, one might safely say it is one of mistrust. England opened her arms not to the true Belgians alone, that little gallant army to whose valour we owe so much, but, for their sake, indiscriminately to the hordes of German spies who came over with the first influx of refugees, to the dregs of humanity who were let loose when the cosmopolitan prison doors were thrown open.

France was wiser. Hospitality, she said, is all very well, but *first* of all we will sift our guests and



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discover which of them are deserving. And sifting them she is, allotting them freedom in their own sphere, but not freedom to circulate in the zone of other armies. Not that France for a moment belittles or undervalues the achievement of that valiant little country or its heroic King, but she realises—as do most Belgians themselves—the danger attendant upon this promiscuous harbouring of unregistered adults whose political leanings may be entirely alien.

In due course, no doubt, when our paroxysm of Belgian mania dies, we too shall come to see the wisdom of this measure.

*January 9th.* We are now beginning to receive Christmas packages sent out from home some six weeks back, which, owing to lack of sorters to attend to them, have been held up at Havre. Hitherto, the postal arrangements have been most primitive and as surprising as they were vague. Some letters and packages would arrive by the French post, some via the Red Cross service, and yet others by the military mail from Havre. A missive might take anything from three days to four weeks on its way from home.

But now we are less cut off from civilisation,



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and not only letters but papers as well arrive regularly; and perhaps the most welcome sound of the day is the newsboys' cry as they run along the quay or dart into hotels and hospitals with lightning-like rapidity, heralding their arrival with shouts of "*Dailee Mai-il! Mirreure! Times!*"

To-day Major X—— asked me to run a canteen for his men, whose lot, too far from the town to be able to enjoy the shops, is far from enviable. True to the principle of doing *anything* that is needed, I am off home to get the stores together.

*January 14th.* The five days' "furlough" have passed as a dream, and it was with a sigh of infinite relief that I stepped once more on to French soil.

The extraordinary "let's-muddle-along-it-can't-last-for-ever" attitude at home is distinctly depressing, and the fact that half of the people are quite content to let others do their job whilst they look on with an amused smile and reap the benefit of the shortage of men makes one long to see them well "strafed."

As I sat in the theatre beside an old friend,

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now an enthusiastic captain in K.'s Army, and thought how soon the brave fellow would be facing the Reality of what he enjoys now so thoroughly as a Theory, and listened to the cheap patriotism of the show, it seemed the cheaper for the lack of action.

Why, after all, should our beautiful island be left with the unfit, the loafers, the "funks" as fathers for the future generations? In every other country the army is representative, not of the pick of the land, but of the average male population. We, however, seem bent on committing race suicide.

But as the old familiar quay hove in sight my spirits rose. Here, after all, lies work that must be done. It is the Real Thing.

If my leave has been short it has been pregnant with interest. The personal side centred itself on the lost trunk, containing all my worldly possessions in the way of wearing apparel, which was sent out in November and has failed to arrive. Scotland Yard have traced it as far as Boulogne, they say. I drew their attention to the wonderful No Man's Land that reigns where all luggage is dumped on the quay.

Once off the boat the English liability ceases,

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and so, as the French will take no responsibility, the goods lie there until someone, usually *not* the rightful owner, helps himself.

Thus when a box addressed : " Captain Y——, Xth Regiment—Fur Coat—to be delivered immediately," that has lain for three weeks in the rain, disappears at *last*, one may be quite safe in assuming that the same fur coat will be fetching a good price on the Paris market a few days hence.

The second and more important interest is the canteen.

Just as the control of all cars and hospitals has been now taken over definitely by the War Office, surely even so small a thing as canteen work should all be under one organisation. The Y.M.C.A., it appears, have a recreation hut for the men at the convalescent camp and a big hut on the quay.

To the Y.M.C.A., then, let our energies be dedicated! For they are a coming factor in the scheme of things, and individual enterprise, gratifying and profitable though it may be to the individual, is hardly *pro bono publico*.

*January 15th.* There are hours when one would love a little solitude—the solitude that is,



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after all, as necessary for well-being as food and rest; hours when the time to digest and sift the manifold occurrences of the day, the presence of a congenial friend to replace the many acquaintances with whom circumstances have herded us together, and a browse over a favourite poet, would be very welcome. Yet, in truth, poetry no longer matters, art no longer matters, music no longer matters to most of us; nothing *really* matters save life and death and the end of this carnage. Nor will the old régime, the old art, the old literature ever again satisfy those who have seen red and faced life shorn of its trappings of superficiality and conventions. Yet in spite of the fact that all around us we see butchery and the degrading results of Germany's peculiar *kultur*, in spite of the fact that the spiritual side of life has been—is still—so utterly dormant as to be almost a thing of another existence, on the whole an attitude of great enthusiasm and gratitude prevails for the privilege of being able to work.

*January 18th.* My first glimpse at a canteen!

Let me describe the scene as we entered to find a long queue of shivering Tommies waiting. The long "hut," at the end of which, on a plat-





THE FIRST HUT AT THE BASE



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form, the piano tinkles incessantly, seemed smaller by reason of the many chairs and forms.

The counter, on the clearing of which our attention was turned first, like the tables, is covered with red-and-white check oilcloth, which facilitates the swabbing up of the ever crowded place.

Behind the counter are tables, on which, in between serving the men, we busy ourselves with the preparation of cocoa, the cutting up of cakes and bread, an occupation which I discover to be as much a science as an art.

In the little kitchen the great struggle is to get water boiling in time, and to keep it boiling, in response to the demand. The difficulty at the counter is to keep tea and coffee hot without letting them stew. At one end we take it in turns to take money and to dole out tickets, which are exchanged for goods at the counter. The advantages of the ticket system are mostly noticeable during a "rush," when it diverts the stream of men and obviates the necessity of serving food with coin-soiled hands.

One must, it seems, keep as little as possible on the counter, for fear of tempting Providence and the impecunious! But a wonderful medley

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of tobacco, soap, bootlaces, chocolate, etc., is displayed on shelves at the back.

Here the men can write home on paper supplied free by the Y.M.C.A. (A big notice on the wall reminds them to "Write home now.") They can read (a small library, which my fingers are itching to catalogue, lies at the end of the building); they can bank here, and play games, and get advice on all problems, mental and moral.

The value of the work can best be estimated by the men's appreciation of it in their letters home, their continual inquiries after similar institutions "up the line," their sorrow when they hear: "No, we're not up there yet—but shall be soon."

The workers consist of Y.M.C.A. secretaries, mostly Nonconformist ministers, and volunteer ladies who wander on duty when the spirit moves them, which sometimes necessitates one shift going without its meals.

A pleasant little music teacher, who is spending her holiday out here, and is useful for organising concerts, accompanying the men, etc., initiated me into the work. The rest of the "staff" consists of a French girl, to cook the secretaries' meals, and a half-witted man, supposed



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to tend the fires, help with the washing up, etc., but who is invariably inspired to play hymns just when most needed.

*January 25th.* A naval battle off the Dogger Bank is reported, which reminds me of the letters I receive from a naval friend, whose life on board the — is spent patrolling the North Sea and longing for action. How different from the fighting friends one runs into occasionally! The other day I came across one who was down with a touch of tonsillitis, having passed through Mons and every big battle that succeeded it unscathed. “I shouldn’t at all mind going home with a smashed arm!” he remarked with an almost involuntary sigh, gazing wistfully at the hospital ship as she sailed majestically out of harbour, her gleaming red cross casting weird lights on the dark water.

*January 28th.* There are times when one is unkind enough to wish one’s co-workers the discipline of three months as junior probationer in a large hospital. Last night I arrived to find myself the only worker, and although *I* enjoyed the rush right enough, it was impossible to get things done

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

to time, and many of the men had to go away unserved.

The methylated spirit ran out, and so demobilised the services of the Primus stoves. The secretary had a bad headache, and was therefore only able to sit at the till, and the odd man was inspired to make night hideous with his discordant hymns, and, having had a tiff with one of the ladies earlier in the day, refused to do a stroke of work. It was a particularly busy night, never less than a hundred men in the hut, I should say, and ten o'clock found me still washing up cups with the aid of a little chauffeur whose vehicle had gone wrong! *Faute de mieux* he accompanied me along the roughest part of the quay, where one is apt to be molested by the drunken navvies who reel about at night.

*January 30th.* Wish hard enough and it shall be given unto you! Yesterday was a day of joy, for in it I found a real girl friend of my own age and kind.

She appeared on the scene one morning like a breath of fresh air, this young American.

“What are *you* doing over here?” I asked.  
“Come to see the war?”

January, 1915

“Guess you’re about right,” she replied, with an accent you could cut with a knife. “Nothing else would have dragged me away from God’s own country!”

*January 31st.* The old order changeth—even in Boulogne! In less than a week the Red Cross will be installed at the C——, where once was the Allied Forces Base Hospital. In less than a week all Red Cross cars come under direct supervision of the A.S.C.

To-day the Red Cross sisters at the Gare Maritime (No. — Stationary Hospital) have received their *cong  *, even those “original six” who built it up, being superseded by Army nurses.

Most of the nurses I know have dispersed, many to St. Omer, where in a big monastery hospital they are stamping out enteric amongst the civilian population in order to safeguard our men. Miss A—— has gone to L——, where, from Dr. Le Page’s hospital, she writes of wonderful surgical work.

I too would be glad of a new sphere of action, for I am lost in amazement at the sea of petty jealousies. Where is the unity of purpose that bound us all together in the beginning? Is dis-

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

union the outcome of overwrought nerves? Even at the hut discord reigns.

The lady in charge dislikes both the music teacher and the American girl, who in turn live at daggers drawn with the respective people of their respective parties and are envious of each other. And yet they one and all are extremely nice folk. One must attribute it to some especially puissant sprite and to Pandora's carelessness!



## CHAPTER V

**February, 1915**

*February 2nd.* This morning, in company with our chief, Mr. H——, I went over to prospect in the new sphere of action. The lower part of the hotel that the Association has taken is devoted to a canteen, whilst on the first floor there is a library and writing-room, and above, seven spacious rooms lie empty until such a time as the hostel is started. The hostel is a grand scheme for billeting gratis the relatives of badly wounded men, who could otherwise not afford the journey.

My heart sank at sight of the minute kitchen, the range of which seemed literally hidden by pots and pans; but no doubt one day we shall get it in order.

The secretary—a Scottish padre—is full of enthusiasm for football, with which he hopes to keep the men at the base well amused.

In the afternoon, on exploring for myself, I discovered that the most interesting feature of the

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

place is the isolation compound that lies alongside the enteric hospital. Here all infectious illnesses are treated in bathing-boxes rigged out as wards; here are patients indulging in every conceivable disease, from mumps and measles to diphtheria, typhoid and the dreaded spinal meningitis.

Farther along, attached to the Casino, whose spacious gaming rooms make wonderfully cheerful wards, is a smaller hotel, where the men suffering from skin diseases are treated. One's heart goes out to these men, especially the wounded ones, who through no fault of their own are afflicted with the foul diseases that follow in the train of war.

The main road is lined with hospitals—the “British,” the “Anglo-American,” the “Rawal Pindi” (so called because the unit was mobilised in that far-away Indian station), and others.

The great objection to the converted hotels is the smallness of the well-appointed rooms, which gives one the desire to knock down intervening walls and form them into one spacious room to save the sisters' feet and the patients' voices!

One is lost in admiration now at the organisation of things, just as two months ago one was

## February, 1915

appalled by the state of unreadiness. Nothing that can be done for our men is omitted.

*February 3rd.* For the last time I watch the moon wane, the sun rise over the mist-bathed harbour. Will the picture I have learned to love so well ever fade? The countless masts rising to the sky, the water dashing over the distant break-water, the clock at the Gare Maritime, now visible, now obscured by smoke from the packet-boat's funnel.

The incoming destroyers, the sister hospital ships lying abreast, the distant windmill on the hill, round which many corrugated iron buildings are springing up (bakeries, they say), the weather-beaten tars, the women, their backs bent with the weight of their sacks of mussels and cockles, tramping along barefooted or in sabots, the ceaseless stream of ambulances.

*February 8th.* Laden with parting gifts and consoled by parting regrets (strangest among them those of our padre, who will miss having someone to darn his socks!), we found ourselves at our new domain—the American girl and I.

Certainly the circumstances of our arrival were

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

far from favourable, for my colleague fell very ill the day we arrived, and after a night spent on the floor of her ten-by-eight-feet-long room (oh, those boards!—my bones still ache, my head swims in memory of them), we installed her in a military hospital, and set to work to “carry on.”

Two other workers have arrived from England; neither of them having done hard manual labour before, they are apt to find this somewhat strenuous, though to our more veteran hands it is child’s play. Footsoreness, too, that bane of all amateur workers, is their portion.

There are times when one wonders if all new things are horrid!

This morning, at Mattins in the little tin church, for instance, when the convalescent soldier organist, with the angelic face and absolute lack of any musical instinct, crashed out his last discordant notes, when the congregation, consisting of three nurses, the old, old man who took round the plate, and two maiden ladies who acted as choir, trooped into the sunshine, I could not but cast a longing thought at St. John’s, with its dim religious glow and mellow organ and congregation of muddy soldiers.



## February, 1915

*February 12th.* Besides getting the place in order, we are busily employed in thinking out new dishes for the men. To the ordinary store of cakes and drinks we have already added custard, stewed fruits, and bread puddings.

In spare moments I catalogue the library, and have evolved a good system by which the men fill in the register themselves on taking out a book, thus dispensing with a librarian. The library book is like this :

Rank	Name	Number	Regt.	No. of Book	Name of Book	Date taken
Pte.	J. Smith	30496	R.F.	4	"She"	Feb. 1
Cpl.	J. Philips	5328	R.A.M.C.	299	"Last Days of Pompeii"	Feb. 10

*February 16th.* Yesterday, a train being derailed close by here on its way up to the front, and the men left stranded, we took them up a supply of cigarettes and chocolates that good friends at home had sent out.

The canteen is growing like wildfire, and we are heart and soul in our work, which we estimate by the material return in the till each evening. We have trebled the receipts in two weeks, which shows how the men are flocking to it.

*February 18th.* *The day*—the great day of the German blockade. We are wondering how

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

far the enemy will really carry out his scheme. Certainly no mail boat has come in to-day, and we are without letters or newspapers. The suspension of communication with England is nothing new, but we are speculating if this time it will be a matter of weeks instead of days.

Being *hors de combat* with a sore throat—the toll exacted apparently by this germ-filled place from every worker who comes to stay—I have leisure to note our surroundings. The walls of the large, airy room, which though devoid of all save the necessities of life is luxury embodied by reason of its cleanliness, are bare except for a few unpaid bills held together by a file, a few hastily scrawled quotations from favourite authors to remind us that we once had time to indulge in beautiful pictures, to roam into the realms of beautiful books.

By the window, acting as a couch, are two large wooden cases in which gramophones for the men had been sent out, and which prove a great attraction to the friendly little mice who come out and hold long confabulations, not only under cover of night, but frequently, when things are quiet, by day. They are welcome enough to the wooden boxes, but when they take to running over our

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beds, our clothing as it lies on the chairs, and finally even over our *faces*, they can hardly expect to be well received!

The view from the window is superb. Before us, in front of the little grey church, the river runs down to the sea, now gently, now turbulently. To the right a peep of the ocean. To the left the bridge, through the arches of which is a glimpse of landscape as peaceful as any Tuscan village, and over which the trains pass intermittently up to the front by day and by night. They rush past with a whistle that is more of a shriek and a groan, as if they themselves realised the value of their burden—the guns, the ammunition wagons, the trainloads of men in khaki or in blue clustered along the edge of the overcrowded trucks designed to carry “eighteen horses or thirty-six men.”

In contrast with the rushing up-trains the loaded ambulances crawl creakingly down at a snail's pace.

God! That such things should be! If the heart of the world were big enough, surely it would break at so much misery, so much destruction. For what have all previous generations laboured, legislating, studying to salve human

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

ills? For this! Wanton destruction, rapine, murder.

*February 21st.* These are exciting times. Last night there was the sound of guns at sea. An engagement off Dover is recounted, but papers no longer get through to us. A sudden explosion about five o'clock the same day, and the subsequent report of a sunken hospital ship, afterwards said to have been a neutral (Dutch?) liner, leaves us with but the vaguest idea of what really happened.

Just as the doctor, a kindly little man, who was invalided down some weeks ago from his field ambulance at B——, had appeared, stethoscope in hand, all attention was riveted on a funeral that passed by—that of a nursing sister who has just died of the fatal spotted fever. The flower-bedecked coffin, the whole available hospital unit marching slowly with arms reversed, made an impressive sight. One wondered if she had ever received so much attention in her lifetime as at her death. The doctor told me that in India, where the intense heat is sometimes conducive to suicide, the fear of *not* having a military funeral often acts as a deterrent.





“THE BRIDGE, THROUGH THE ARCHES OF WHICH  
IS A GLIMPSE OF LANDSCAPE AS PEACEFUL AS  
ANY TUSCAN VILLAGE”



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No sooner was the cortège past than a broken aeroplane rolled by on a heavy trolley, and left us wondering if that was the crash we heard yesterday.

An air raid on Calais, packet-boat nearly sunk, torpedoes off Boulogne—it almost seems as if we are going to see the real thing.

Martial law here has become very strict. The roads are guarded so that one cannot move an inch without showing passports. Lights have to be out by 9 P.M., and even my diary has to be penned behind a screen of bedclothes with the aid of a candle stump. Seeing that we only finish work at 9 P.M., have to get home, eat our supper, and go to bed in the dark, it is rather tiresome, and we are now engaged in rigging up light-proof curtains.

On returning to work after my first committee meeting—the very existence of which proves the method that is creeping into the erstwhile chaos—I was greeted by the news of our Dardanelles Expedition which is now occupying all our attention.

## CHAPTER VI

March, 1915

*March 5th.* March was inaugurated by an amusing incident. At about midnight the alarm was given—a Taube or Zeppelin signalled from Calais—bells rang, guns boomed, the whole of the French population turned out, and the police raided a nurse's room because a light was visible—and, after all, nothing happened.

That the Germans still have hopes of getting to Calais is obvious from their Press comments on the range of their coast guns.

“The chief point of which lies in the suggestion that from Calais the harbour defences of Dover can be bombarded over a front of five and a half miles!” (See extract from *Daily Mail*.) Their preparations for billeting a number of troops in Belgium are large: “At Liège 20,000 men are expected.” The order has been given for the Wimereux hospitals to be cleared.

“It is our duty to keep the men here and feed



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the front," said one of the C.O.s to-day. "And when we are told to clear it means a big move."

*March 10th.* In spite of the fact that a great battle is raging at Neuve Chapelle, where the British have made a great push, the "all star" concert party, sent over by the Y.M.C.A. in London, gave a performance in the large gaming room of the Casino (once the haunt of so much frivolity). The worst cases lay in beds in the centre, whilst the blue-jacketed lesser cases clustered behind, and the sisters flitted to and fro in their grey dresses and red capes attending to the more serious.

"Messieurs, faites vos jeux, le jeu est fait!" Over and over again the suave voice of the croupier seemed to ring in my ears—as it had so often rung in this very room in peace time. "Faites vos jeux." What an awful thing this new game of War is, only those who have seen can grasp.

"Le jeu est fait!"—and here in this gilded hall, that once witnessed such a different game, we see the results.

Stretchers were brought in all through the performance. As I glanced up during the cheerful chorus of "Here we are—here we are—here

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

we are again!" a man was borne in with his eyes blown out. He lay very still, as if the unaccustomedness of it was yet upon him. The tears blinded me. Then he too began to sing.

The spirits of the men are wonderful. "It's worth losing a limb to live through a victory!" they say.

When our work was over we left the close, smoke-choked room (and it is wonderful how soldiers who have had a sufficiency of open-air life seem to revel in closed doors and windows!) for a short stroll. It was a still, foreboding night. The barriers were well guarded, darkness reigned over the town, and as we strolled along the rough road our path was lighted only by the passing ambulances, whilst across the lowering heavy heavens played the searchlights.

Ambulance after ambulance passed, a few going fast, most, alas! at the slow, cautious speed that betokens the worst.

What untold misery these crushed bits of humanity mean, borne swiftly to the silent city of suffering! How gladly we would suffer for them! Yet not a moan, not a groan, in those great wards whilst mind and will have power to cope with the agonies of the flesh.

## March, 1915

*March 12th.* We heard interesting anecdotes of our fighters at Christmas-time from an important man on the court martial. One private, under cover of festivities, slipped down to the base, where for some months he has lived in style on French bounty as an officer of the Guards! Another man, an N.C.O. employed in office work, was told off to write out notices forbidding the men overburdened with Christmas gifts to return things home, as they have been doing. He handed in the documents, and with them a big parcel to be censored, which when opened was found to contain a quantity of socks, bearing the legend: "These may come in useful."

*March 13th.* Soup is the latest addition to our bill of fare for the men, who greatly appreciate it as being more nourishing than tea.

Our battle with Primus stoves is never-ending. The roar of these little indispensable instruments of torture haunts us, and an effigy of one will assuredly be engraven on some of our tombstones! Apropos of food, we have grown almost into vegetarians, the meat we get being mostly horse—which, dressed in the delightfully piquant French style, is tasty but not nourishing—or the

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eternal pork that occurs and recurs with clockwork regularity alternately disguised as veal, lamb or mutton.

There are days when we envy the men—whose rations of good bully beef they affect to scorn—with all our hearts.

The spring push continues. The rapidity with which the Neuve Chapelle men were brought down to the base, often finding themselves in hospital twelve hours after they fell, is incredible.

Last night a Red Cross ambulance driver, who had passed through before, came in for some coffee. As he counted his change I noted his eyes were dim with unshed tears. When he confessed that the strain of many sleepless nights is beginning to tell on him, I could find few words of comfort.

The awful groans, the prayers for release as he drives along the jolting roads, petrify him. And these last days have been pregnant with work for the ambulances. The culminating point was reached to-night, when, the car breaking down on a lonely road, he stepped round to find out how his men were, and discovered that of four only one still lived.



## March, 1915

*March 18th.* To-day the news came that the hostel is to be officially opened. From the batch of War Office correspondence with which I am now inundated I glean :

1. "Arrangements have now been made to send to France at the public expense a limited number of relatives of soldiers reported to be in a very serious condition in the Base Hospitals."

2. "The number will be limited to six persons at each of the Bases and to one relative in the case of each soldier, the accommodation being provided by the Y.M.C.A., and visits will only be allowed in cases in which the Medical Officer considers that the patient would benefit by the presence of a relation."

The rest of the documents relate to the laws that govern the free passage, and the certificates to the effect that the relative is unable to pay necessary expenses required before passage is granted, every emergency being admirably prepared for.

Walking out after some necessary shopping, I noticed how the Wimereux road has changed—is changing. Often during the winter months we tramped along in the blinding rain wondering at the loneliness of it all, meeting none but pickets

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

at the barricades, the storm-swept roads lighted every twenty minutes by a passing tram!

And now? Spring is beginning to show in every cranny. The few trees are bursting with buds. The road is one incessant rush of cars. The once sleepy-looking fort, with its visible guns facing the sea, booms an occasional shot across the bows of a defaulting vessel, and French soldiers manœuvre on the cliffs.

It seems as if spring had put life into everything. To the left a camp hospital is springing up, and khaki figures toil away with ropes and canvas. To the right, by the sea, walls of earth are being thrown up that look like trenches, but are in reality drains.

Even the men from the trenches are full of the dramatic contrasts of warfare in spring—the song of the lark or nightingale interrupted by the bursting of the “Jack Johnsons”; the burned trees and sprouting buds. They tell us, too, most extraordinary tales of women being found in the German trenches we have recently gained: some maintain they were French civilian prisoners; others that they were the wives of some of the front-trench Huns. At any rate, the extraordinary fact remains that they really *were* there.

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*March 19th.* With the aid of a fatigue party of R.A.M.C. men I succeeded in getting the upstairs rooms of our place into a semblance of order. The French staff, too, were invaluable, nothing being too much trouble for the *pauvres blessés*. Anxieties never some singly, and to-day proved our heaviest day owing to an influx of Canadians and an army of navvies in Government employment. No sooner were things straight than in came our first two "wounded relatives"—as we have decided to dub our guests. Weary, dazed, helpless as children, there was nothing to do but find them some hot supper and get them to bed, with promises of conducting them to the hospital the first thing in the morning.

There being no cupboards in the hostel, we have set to work to make them out of old packing-cases, and with the remnants of our curtains and old tablecloths we find them to be, if not beautiful, quite as serviceable as could be expected.

One difficulty we cannot overcome is the odour from the cesspool that forms our drainage system, and makes one of the valuable rooms quite untenable and another hardly aromatic!

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*March 21st.* On our way home last night we paused a moment to look at the sky.

Gazing from the bridge into the water, it seemed a very Paradise. Every little star was reflected in the river, and a yellow crescent moon rode low in the heavens. No sound save the murmur of the sea. Suddenly there fell upon our ears the strains of a mandoline in the distance that transported us of a sudden to the sunny shores of the Adriatic.

Our delay might have cost us dear, for on our arrival home my attic was on fire, some clothing that my companion had put on the stove pipes to air having caught, smouldered, and set light to linoleum and woodwork. Another ten minutes and nothing could have saved this jerry-built wooden villa. It was dawn before we slept, and, needless to remark, I feel like a kipper to-day, the smell of the smoke is so strong ; or some amphibious animal, for the floor is inundated with water.

*March 23rd.* The news of victories and losses in the outside world affects us greatly, and the fall of Przemyśl to the Russians has had a very good effect on our spirits.

For ourselves, we are growing accustomed to



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alarms. We have so many Zeppelin scares that they begin to be of no interest. A horn is sounded. The French sentries on the bridge grow seemingly agitated; the French guard turn out. Groups of people stand gazing Calais-wards into the sky. An aeroplane comes over—scouting—and that is all.

Apparently, however, the biplane that passed so close that it seemed almost on top of our balcony yesterday, was one of those which dropped bombs on Dover! Our first conscious sight of hostile craft, this, though we saw something strangely resembling a periscope on the glassy waters.

*March 26th.* A strange little tragedy is being enacted in our kitchen. Our landlady's husband was reported "missing," and whilst she was gone in search of further information a neighbour, who had been fighting by his side, came in to confirm the worst fears. He was killed by a sniper, we were told, after only one month in the trenches; and but yesterday the poor little woman was spending one franc fifty to send him a fourpenny piece of sausage.

She came in happily content, having learned no particulars, talking cheerfully of the now

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fashionable khaki uniforms the women are adopting, and the weeping figures in the kitchen pulled themselves together and pretended nothing had occurred.

*March 29th.* When the news was broken they feared for her reason. For the last three days she has lain foodless and sleepless, hugging the portrait of her husband to her heart, sorting out his old letters, whilst groups of weeping, crêpe-swathed friends throng the stuffy, unventilated room.

The Boulogne regiment, it seems, has had a bad cutting-up. Hardly a woman who is not a widow now. “Mort pour la patrie!” they cry sadly—“et après la guerre?”

To us any condition of “après la guerre” has become unthinkable. Sometimes it seems it must be the end of the world.

*March 30th.* According to the local customs, Madame will not leave the house until the news of her husband's death has been officially announced by the Mayor. Thus any shopping expeditions in quest of the mourning which engrosses her whole attention have to be made surreptitiously.

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The official news may be a long time in coming—weeks, perhaps months—nevertheless, until she has, with the calm resignation demanded by the occasion, received the official confirmation of the news, she will not show her face out of doors. We all pray the ceremony may be soon over, for surely nothing could be worse for a mourner than an uninterrupted brooding over pots and pans in a hot or crowded kitchen.

## CHAPTER VII

**April, 1915**

*April 1st.* In spite of the difficulties of getting teams together, the football league has flourished, and to-day we had the great final match between Australians and the A.S.C., for which, at a few hours' notice, aided by a solitary car, we managed to give a fairly successful tea.

Thanks to the football and the various other "tournaments," the canteen is becoming quite an important factor of the little colony out here. We find that draught, chess and billiard tournaments draw the men (who are apt to be "cliquy" and shy of each other) together more than anything else, whilst French lessons—held by a poor little Belgian soldier, himself far from fluent in the language—prove a tremendous attraction, and serve the additional purpose of adding a moiety to his minute income.

We have moved on to the premises in order to be better able to attend to our "relatives," as they have a way of turning up at ten at night,



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quite exhausted with the novelty of their experience. To be honest, the interest of their journey seems to a great extent to mitigate the bitterness of their loss or the sadness of their visit.

“ Law bless us, Miss, what a lot we shall ’ave to tell ’em at ’ome, which we shouldn’t ’ave ’ad if our dear Bill ’adn’t died for ’is country !” said a Manchester washerwoman to-day.

We are a strange party at meals, for most of them have never seen a tablecloth nor slept between sheets before, and their wonderment can be well gauged.

It is surprising how often one comes across Nature’s gentlemen ; one is ashamed at not having had time to see them in ordinary life. A cab-driver from “ Edinbury ” is here to-day, who, in spite of the fact that he had never before been outside his native town, has manners that would grace a king.

*April 8th.* One is not always fortunate in one’s companions out here, but, having no choice in the matter, is fain to make the best of them.

I don’t think I have described our various workers. There is, for instance, the short, drab-looking type of woman who gives one the impres-

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sion that she is capable only of practical things—a model housewife and cook—but who, on further acquaintance, affords some food for comment; for, alas! her distrait little brain is eternally going off at a tangent; she has neither method nor common sense. If there is a tactless thing to be said, she will say it. If there is a foolish thing to be done, she will do it. To-day, to our horror, one of these, for instance, turned to an old man from Derbyshire—who was out to see a son dying of spotted fever—just as he was taking his departure.

“By the way,” she said, “if you find anyone at home whose son is dying out here, *do* tell them that it is such a pretty cemetery and so well cared for. . . .”

I need say no more.

At every inconvenient moment she tells one anecdotes of her family history—how her daughters have bought a white rabbit, how her second husband committed suicide (we are not surprised!), how a third cousin has been mentioned in dispatches.

She alternately adopts a *de haut en bas* tone towards the men and informs them that she is an officer's widow and has never done any work

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before, or tries to claim kinship with the enlisted navy because he is John Smith and she has a connection of the same name.

Is it to be wondered that there is sometimes friction? We have had a trying time recently, and have come to the conclusion that what one does not learn of petty jealousy and feminine hate out here is not worth learning! And the genus "official enemy"—unknown, hitherto, to me—is quite common. It consists of people who want one's job, or one's friends, or anything else one has; but, most of all, they want one out of the country and out of the way.

To keep our judgment unbiased we have conned Kipling's wonderful "If" and find some measure of comfort in murmuring, as we fall asleep :

*" If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs  
and blaming it on you—*

*If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you, yet make  
allowance for their doubting, too—*

*If you can wait—and not be tired by waiting or being lied  
about, don't deal in lies—*

*Or being hated, don't give way to hating—and yet not look too  
good nor talk too wise."*

We have had quite a number of minor worries, too, which culminated this evening, when, our

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last bucketful of coal, borrowed from a friendly hospital, having been exhausted, it was found impossible to obtain more than half a litre of methylated spirits (with which we had hoped to carry on our work by means of Primus stoves) from anywhere. For the first time not only hot dishes had to be abandoned, the pancakes and fried fish which the men like so well, but even the hot drinks, which we endeavoured to replace by lukewarm lemonade made from the remnants of our boiled water. Heaven alone knows from where we shall get our coal to-morrow, for the shortage seems to be getting worse. If only the people at home would realise what it means out here, and cease striking! When things had settled down and the place was closed, I felt a blow of fresh air was imperative, for the vitiated atmosphere of the rooms is choking and we have no time to walk by day.

As we slipped outside, Captain M—— passed. “What on earth are you doing here?” he asked. I replied that we had been breathing Woodbine fumes for twelve solid hours, and had come out to get some air.

“Take care not to be run in by the sentries,” he said. “I will accompany you if I may, for



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safety's sake." It is true we are bounded by sentries north, south, east and west.

We walked briskly to the beach, where a full moon lit up the sea, forming what looked like a broad path straight up to heaven.

We were laughing over the tale of the immortal Dr. Spooner who concluded one of his sermons with the words : " And now, dear friends, I must draw to a close, for I see I am already addressing beery wenches !" when Captain M——, asking " May I smoke ? " proceeded to light his pipe, or *try* to do so, for each time he lit a match the breeze put it out. Whilst he retired to light it by the rocks someone quoted another Spoonerism—when to a negligent student he said : " You have hissed all my mystery lessons and tasted half a worm ! "

Laughing and all but forgetting our weariness, we turned to go home.

In the distance we discerned figures coming towards us—steadily and from all sides.

" Strange ! " said someone. " The beach seemed deserted enough when we came. "

" Why, it's gendarmes ! " I cried.

And sure enough it was, and they were advancing, rifles cocked and loaded.

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They came straight up to us and halted four paces away, just as we were debating whether to run away or trust to luck that our escort could protect us.

In a stentorian voice the leader exclaimed accusingly : " You lit three matches."

No one denied it, and on Captain M—— parleying with them, it transpired that under martial law the beach and cliffs are entirely forbidden precincts after sundown.

On discovering who we were they owned that they had seriously debated the advisability of shooting us from the cliffs, and would certainly have done so had we turned tail and fled !

Insignificant though the incident is, it serves to show how efficiently our Allies guard their coast, how thorough and quick they are in their methods, and how little they leave to chance, even at a hospital base.

*April 22nd.* It has been impossible to write. We have been working sixteen to eighteen, even twenty, hours per day. The rush of troops that preceded and succeeded the British success at Hill 60 has broken up most of the camp workers, so that we have taken to rising at 4 A.M., motor-

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ing to the camp in the car now devoted to the "relatives," and turning our hands at other people's jobs before it is time to begin our own.

Camp work is different from anything in the world. The crowd is such that it is impossible (with our limited number of workers and insufficient equipment) to keep supplies equal to demand.

After an hour spent in handing out field service post cards (which is all the men may send home from here) one is dizzy from the crowd. Twenty thousand cards disappear in less time than it takes to tell, although each man is in reality only allowed one.

They will come up time after time pleading for a second. "I've a wife *and* a mother," says one; while the wilier will ask: "Can I have a second for the company sergeant-major, who is outside the tent?"

"What, the *same* company sergeant-major?" I inquired, after the twentieth application of this kind.

If you are cutting up loaves or buttering bread you become breathless in your haste as the many hungry eyes gaze eagerly at the food.

Many of the men have gone foodless since they

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

embarked, ten hours ago, and some, who have eaten, have been so sea-sick as to be quite collapsed. They are alternately full of anticipation and trepidation about the Great Unknown, and a quiet "It isn't nearly as bad as it was at the beginning" sends many of them away more reassured.

The turf inside the tent is an odd mixture of slush where the rain beats in, and almost concrete mud where the trampling is worst. It has been found necessary to put up a barrier by the "counter," which is made of empty packing-cases, but often, where the crowd is greatest, it literally gets rooted up.

It is hard to say which is the more impressive sight: to arrive at dawn and watch the shivering figures emerge from their tents, wrapped in those fine new blankets of theirs, and cluster round our quarters, held back by the stern arm of the military policeman until six o'clock announces that we are prepared—or nominally so—for the rush; or to watch them march off at night.

On Sunday there was a service. The men came running to the tents and called for their favourite hymns. There were two oil lamps in the centre, and someone secured a candle for my



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counter. Never can I forget that scene—averted eyes, tense set mouths, and rugged faces with the tears rolling down. Men who had never prayed before prayed then, for they had the Unknown to face and they knew it. They lifted the tent with their voices. Then, seeing I was the last English girl many of them would ever set eyes on, a number came up to shake hands and say good-bye and “Thank you.” Heaven knows for what!

Then we watched them march off. The camp gleamed white in the moonlight. A crescent moon was over the silver sea, across which the lights of England were plainly discernible.

By the flare of one great lamp they came up out of the dark, and, company after company, like a phantom army, passed into the night.

It seemed like a dream. The receding tramp, tramp, tramp, the distant sound of drums, the deserted tents. And only the lazy flap of the canvas in the breeze remained to remind us of those heroes who have gone up to “carry on” the great game.

*April 24th, Sick Ward 21.* What a very beautiful place hospital can be, viewed from the

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

standpoint of a patient! What matter that legs are too weak to walk or heads to think? What matter that one's old vulcanite pen feels like cast iron and runs on by itself?

Here are ministering angels who were once mere nurses. Here are friends armed with many good things, with irises and kingcups from the fields and carnations from the south—and newspapers. Yet, alas! the news is not good. In spite of the Allied landing in Gallipoli that raises our expectation of a speedy termination of things, the situation on the Western front is bad. We are now falling back, and the Germans have started an effective offensive at Ypres. It is dreadful to be able to do nothing but listen all night long to the tramp of the newly arrived troops, the sickening sound of the creeping “stretcher cases,” to listen and to pray that all will be well.

*April 29th, Hardelot.* If one were asked to award the palm for good work during the war, one would not hesitate to say that it was due to those whose energies are devoted to the sick nurses.

There is none of the glory, none of the kudos,

April, 1915

none of the laurel-wreath interest that rewards those working amongst the men.

Just the steady, dullish daily duties of caring for and tending an ever-changing stream of weary women! Yet what work can have more far-reaching influence on the wounded and sick than the fact that the nursing sisters are strong and fit to cope with their strenuous work?

Here, in the far-away forest of Hardelot, in the beautiful yet simple house lent by the Duke of Argyll, that, with its distempered white walls, old oak furniture and bright chintzes, seems a veritable bit of England, the Red Cross have opened a home where worn-out nurses may rest and recuperate.

It is like an oasis in this arid land. Lying in the woods on a bank of luscious pine-needles and green moss, while the birds sing, it seems to unaccustomed ears almost perfect; and the calm pines lift their stately heads to the clear blue sky, swaying rhythmically, contentedly, in the breeze. It is intoxicating.

## CHAPTER VIII

**May, 1915**

*May 2nd.* This morning we attended Church Parade at the veterinary camp hard by. The chaplain, who had brought out a recently formed brass band, conducted the service in a large sand-pit from which most of the horses had been removed to the sides. A few tents were dotted about, a few sick animals still rolled in the sand as the men came on parade, whilst a narrow path winding up to the dark pine woods above made us feel for all the world like part of a Wild West Buffalo Bill show.

How the French peasants stared, open-mouthed, as the service proceeded, wondering at our madness as we stood there in the sand-pit, with a misty rain enveloping everything, singing at the top of our voices. Many of the men recognised nurses who had been at clearing stations, as we wended our way amongst the sick and wounded horses, the foals, the "prisoner" animals, and



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glanced at the well-equipped but insufficiently stocked dispensary.

The now famous Pré Catalan farm supplied us with tea, and I could not help recalling how just a year ago we had been lounging in a punt on the Ranelagh lake listening to a band—under somewhat different circumstances! No doubt, somewhere at home, people are still punting on the river, or enjoying a Sunday afternoon nap under the trees, or, being energetically inclined, a round of golf or game of tennis, in surroundings very similar to these. Only as we wandered home past the famous Hill 243, through woods blue with hyacinths, fragrant with wild orchids, primroses, kingcups, violets and every perfect flower one could desire or dream of, and every perfect woodland perfume one could experience, and every perfect colour the eye could imagine, the sound of guns booming heavily and not very far away greeted us ominously.

*May 4th.* In an erstwhile hotel facing the sea the Secunderabad General Hospital is situated. Not only are the wards often overcrowded, but rows and rows of beds in the spacious hall, neighbouring villas and auxiliary tents help to cope with

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

the numbers. An all-pervading smell of "ghi," or melted butter, makes one think that Little Black Sambo and all the tigers must have been put in the melting-pot.

Odd black figures, with unfathomable eyes and strange turbans, move about their business stealthily, whilst in the little duty-room two kindly theatre sisters dispense tea to any visitors who call on an uneventful day between the fashionable hours of four and five.

Such is Hardelet. For, apart from the hospital, the Claims Commission, the one shop, hotel and post office, every building is shut up and barred.

A convoy of some fifty ambulances on the road tells its own tale. Sauntering into the one and only shop, I secured the last bottle of ink (which proved to be red), and betaking myself to the sand-dunes, set to work on my diary. Across the vast, untrodden expanse of sand the sun cast long shadows; little fishing boats, bathed in the glow, glided slowly homewards.

Hardelet is said to be an inspiring place. Was not the "Tale of Two Cities" penned here? Was not many an historical drama enacted, verse inspired, music created?



HOSPITAL SHIPS IN THE HARBOUR





May, 1915

Yet France in war-time to anyone incapacitated is wellnigh unbearable.

Again and again unpleasant scenes come up (and when humour flags is life worth living?). The subaltern so unnerved by the sight of his batman (only slightly hit) who was drowned in the mud, that he could do nothing but reiterate, with staring eyes, "And, for all I know, he is there still." Tales of healthy bits of land where, if you ask your way to a certain reserve trench, the direction will be: "First on the left, and past the dead Frenchman on the ant-heap," half-humorous reminiscences of trench-digging where other things—no need to specify—besides caps and boots are turned up, haunt one incessantly, and Morpheus refuses to be wooed.

All day long one notes the veering wind with beating heart, conscious that the prevailing west wind is all-propitious to the German's latest invention of the Devil, the poison-gas; conscious of the long nights in which one has lain awake as the sound of the receding sea was replaced by the ghastly choking of the ward of gassed cases opposite (a sound comparable only to a roomful of panting dogs), or the cough of the man dying with a bullet through his lungs.

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

*May 14th.* At home there are strikes and rumours of strikes, instigated, no doubt, by German emissaries, but none the less shameful for that; and one and all, as the men come down from that "hell with the lid off," where, inch by inch, the Germans are regaining that for which so many lives were sacrificed, their cry is for ammunition.

"We could have held our lines but for the lack of ammunition of the *right kind*," they say—for it seems that ordinary shells are useless when pitted against high explosives and gas.

No one who has not heard that appeal direct from dying lips (for dying men don't lie) can know how great is the longing to tell about it at home—to let the slackers know that for each shell not forthcoming ten valuable lives are lost, ten homes needlessly bereaved. It is intolerably unjust that the man who refuses to do his duty out here is promptly shot, whilst the man who strikes at home is merely bribed with offers of higher wages.

After all, it is a war not only of men, but of arms and ammunition, and it lies in the hands of those at home as much as those out here to see the thing through.

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*May 16th.* At a certain canteen recently a splendid, strapping fellow has been much in evidence. A fine all-round sportsman of good breeding, always ready to lend a hand where required, he made himself beloved by men and canteen-workers alike. In particular he endeared himself to the man in charge of the canteen, to whom he would talk of his wife and children and sports prowess in days gone by.

Over his fighting experiences, however, a veil was drawn; and seeing that even to hint a question about it was to bring a look of unutterable terror, of trench-haunted madness into his eyes, the subject was left in abeyance.

Being neither wounded nor sick, nor attached to the regiment at the base, it was usually assumed that he was an officer's servant, which assumption was corroborated by the amount of spare time on his hands, for he seemed always at the canteen.

One day he came to the man in charge with the request that he should find him some remunerative work. Amazed, the civilian asked, "Why? Aren't you drawing your pay?" Then the truth leaked out. Months back, during an infantry advance, in a fit of madness he had boarded a passing ambulance and found himself at the base.



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In plain words, he was a deserter. For weeks he had lived, evading the canny A.P.M.'s minions by the skin of his teeth, sleeping one night in a barn, the next in a railway truck, the third on the sands, and always feeding at the canteen. A dozen times he had thought the game was up. The strain was beginning to tell, and now that he was down to his last sou there was nothing left for it but to give himself up or cut and run.

Well, for the sake of the wife he was going to risk it.

He did so. But the authorities who scrutinise those little seemingly useless papers on the boat were too sharp for him, and he passed for ever out of the life of the only civilian who knew his story—to be exact, out of the lives of all his friends.

And is not slackness at home all the more reprehensible when one realises the penalties to which men O.A.S. are liable? Is it to be wondered at that we in France would gladly hear the death-sentence passed on every one of those traitor strikers?

*May 17th.* Far, far out, the fisher-folk, their hair and faces white with brine, are shrimping. So far out is the tide that they are mere dark specks



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against the red glow. Farther along the coast a number of A.V.C. officers from remount camps are enjoying a chukker of polo on the firm sands. The sound of heavy firing that had been so audible during the afternoon in the Dover-Calais direction has ceased. The friends who had come out to visit the invalids have departed by the last tram, on which a tall Sikh was busy teaching the French conductor to talk English. The result may be better pictured than described. When they set to work to do a little bartering, ransacking each other's pockets for souvenirs, exchanging two pencils for a cigarette, a penny for a halfpenny, it was interesting to note that the businesslike Frenchman—the bargainer *par excellence*—had met his match at last.

And to-morrow a month's sick leave in Blighty! Baths unlimited! Beef that is beef and not horse! Lamb that is lamb and not goat! Every fibre aches for civilisation.

*May 23rd, London.* No doubt the waitress at the terminus was rather amused by the arrival of three travel-stained creatures, one in mufti and two in uniform, whose first demand was for glasses of clear, cold water. But could she have

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known she would have been astonished to find that, in spite of our bad crossing, our hunger, and the subsequent good dishes she set before us, none of us remembered *anything* half as good as this first unboiled, unchlorinated, unsterilised draught.

It is impossible to blame anyone for failing to take war seriously at home. Here, where "business as usual" is the motto, it is literally inconceivable that anything extraordinary is going on in the world. No wonder that a certain number of women were prating recently of the forthcoming Peace Conference at The Hague. Even those who are worst hit, who have lost their nearest and dearest, are so engrossed in their little charities, their bandage-making and knitting and Red Cross lectures, that they have little leisure to mope. London is as gay or gayer than ever, not a bit purged, for every man home on leave is busy making the best of time. How different from the Frenchman, whose one idea on getting out of the trenches is to set his house in order, to instruct the women who are doing his work how to manipulate the latest agricultural implements, to help prepare for the harvest! Aldershot and its vicinity, for all the many lives that have passed out of it for ever, is the same. And here, in the

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big country houses one visits, people have still leisure to indulge in nerve attacks at the sight of their milliners' bills. Even the rise of that new species, the very temporary gentleman officer, is less remarkable at home. The only change one notices (bar a few dances and cricket matches that have been skipped, maybe out of respect for those who will dance and play no more) is the Continental atmosphere of the streets and theatres.

London is almost as Belgian as Boulogne is anglicised. Rotund Belgians sit knitting in the stalls, their sombre day dresses contrasting strangely with our erstwhile brilliant audiences.

“Evening dress optional but unfashionable,” as one theatre announces.

A joy for ever is the element of free-and-easy good-humour brought over by our Colonials. If the last ten months have done no other good, they have at least knit together, in bonds that can never be riven, our wonderful Empire.

## CHAPTER IX

June, 1915

*June 11th—Cumberland.* Speaking to a gathering of village folk on work in France, I invited debate. "If King George 'as got wot Kaiser Bill wants, why don't they go and fight it out themselves?" asked one man. "Wot difference would it make to us if the country is ruled by Germans or Englishmen?" said another, a lazy fellow whose fields had remained fallow for years, quite oblivious of the fact that under German regime *he* would have been in the firing-line months ago. The rest of the audience shivered with the helpless indecision as to what their right course should be : which shows the little faith felt in the present Government, half hoping for, half fearing the conscription of labour that seems imminent.

That there should exist men who openly confess that from their point of view the end of the war will be disastrous is almost incredible. Yet I



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have come across a clergyman, working in a Midland manufacturing centre, who has many instances of this indifference to recount.

Is it not useless to hope that this war will be the last? So long as men are actuated by motives of commercial profit and agrarian gain, the dream of Universal Peace must remain a chimæra; and the present upheaval, essential to the checking and wiping out of Germany's abnormal line of development, is destined to be only the first step towards the Ideal of Progress which Europe (the Central Powers included) had flattered herself to be following.

Most astounding of all is the utter obliviousness on the part of all at home to the seriousness of the shell campaign, illustrated by the ridicule hurled at those of us who uphold the Northcliffe Press.

As I settled into the corner of the railway carriage, after a delightful week-end with a dear friend in Surrey, a batch of illustrated journals and the *Morning Post* were pressed upon me.

No one can be a more devout devotee of the *Morning Post* Court Circular than my humble self, knowing full well that to miss that interesting document means a gradual drifting without the

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pale of one's many acquaintances. Nevertheless, I asked meekly for "The *Daily Mail*, please!"

"That you, with your love of literature, should read such stuff!" she groaned.

Then, confidently:

"My dear, at any other time I should have *cut you dead* for such a thing."

There was no time to explain, as the train steamed out, that I go to my newspaper for news and not for literature.

Yet I could not refrain from marvelling at the contumely showered on the only organ strong enough to bring the truth before the public and combat the weaknesses of a desultory Government.

The second astounding thing at home is the fact that no one seems to realise the difference between the Front and the Base.

Anywhere in France—Paris excepted—seems to be "the Front," and no one who has not been privileged to peep behind the scenes seems to realise the gap that intervenes between the fighting line and the back of the Front, as one might call the Base.

And one is introduced to a strange medley of people, all "going to the Front."

Not only veteran soldiers and raw recruits and

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nurses, but charming women of leisure who contemplate migrating with their retinue somewhere abroad and earning fame "at a canteen or anything that is wanted—just behind the lines!"

Now, although I can claim to have worked longer at our Base than any other British woman (with one exception), to have withstood the inclemency of its climate and its laws successfully for eight consecutive months, and might therefore pretend to be an authority as to where it really is, not a single friend have I succeeded in convincing that I am not a true heroine—risking my life daily with shells bursting all around and the Huns a few yards away. What they want are descriptions of weeping gas victims and death-bed scenes (that in reality are far better forgotten—if it is possible) and incidents such as a youthful convalescent sapper confided to me recently—of the man who, though his head was blown clean off at midday, was found to be convulsively clawing the earth with fingers that seemed yet alive at sundown!

For such yarns there seems to be a great demand, and if I told them that heroism at the Base consisted of maintaining continual cheerfulness in face of odds like bursting boilers which, for want



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of men, cannot be repaired; if I hinted at the dullness of buttering endless loaves, of wheedling Primus stoves into working order, of changing French money for English at a varying rate of exchange, of living amongst a strange, heterogeneous crowd of people, far away from one's own friends, and stifling longings for one's *lares et penates*, of the dreadful monotony and various other details of barmaiding, amateur and otherwise, I should not be believed.

Therefore, with many a wiser, I seek shelter behind a discreet silence, except when the insistence of the "Do-tell-me-all-about-it! Have-you-seen-lots-of-horrors?" girl elicits an ironical reply to the effect that most of our time is spent in champagne lunches and moonlight picnics.

*June 12th.* I must not omit to note the very interesting meeting with Mr. Henry James—the American author—who has so enthusiastically cast in his lot with the Allies. It was at a tea at the American Embassy. On being introduced, having heard of our work in France, he made no secret of his views.

"You young people are wonderful. You are achieving what no other generation could ever,



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will ever, achieve! After all, this is a young people's war!"

I went home with a heart throbbing with pride at belonging to a generation that, swept by the great driving spirit (maybe something analogous to Maeterlinck's "Spirit of the Hive") from little ruts in life into the great vortex of war, has already proved its metal.

Over and over again one is struck by the extraordinary altruism that is displayed by those taking part in what, after all, is but a tremendous life-and-death struggle.

Everywhere *esprit de corps* prevails amongst the men. Take the private. Maybe he reared poultry in some out-of-the-way farm in Somerset. Maybe his pathetically wizened face tells of a childhood in the slums. Whatever his life was before, he is Private Tommy Atkins now, of the Blankshires—the finest regiment, the finest company, the finest platoon in the British Army; a V.C. regiment he will announce with pride, as he sits down by the dusty roadside to enjoy the ten minutes' halt in what seems an interminable route march.

And the very Temporary Lieutenant whom one knew only a year ago as the "knut," as, in the newest check trousers à l'Américain, he

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lounge bemonocled in the Park, what of him? Was he not correct—very correct and always correct, as he patronised every function of the season—blasé, bored and boring, always ready to criticise every affair with an amusing cynicism?

He, too, chameleon-like, has taken on the tone of his surroundings. Behold him in khaki, a born leader of men! His boredom has become sangfroid, his cynicism has blossomed into a brisk humour that keeps the mess alive, his subservience to the law of the “correct thing” has taught him to face every undreamt-of tight corner with a non-chalance wonderful to behold.

Yes, Henry James is right. “It is a Young People’s War.” It may be an ironical fate that designs the younger generation to lay down their lives for the political blunders of the older—but the true tragedy is not in the youths cut down in the flower of their manhood, nor the girls broken in health by the magnitude of the task they have tackled; the true tragedy is in the derelict “dug-outs” vainly hunting for jobs, the aged women wringing their hands, with the cry, “We are too old to help!”

And when our American friend, speaking of his countrymen’s work and schemes for ameliorat-

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ing the lot of starving Belgium, remarked that our work will not have finished with the cessation of hostilities, for then alone will the full pinch and hardships of war be felt, the destitution shorn of the gilding of excitement and uncertainty, I knew he spoke truly.

The end of the last month all eyes were focused on Italy's rupture with Austria (we note that diplomatic relations with Germany are not broken off, no doubt for reasons commercial). To all who have travelled much in that land of sunshine it was apparent that, whichever way politics might trend, public feeling (barring that section of the proletariat under strong Papal influence) would always be with the Allies; nor was it possible to imagine any alliance between Italy and her hereditary foe, the Hun, other than an alliance of convenience. The Italian's contempt for Teuton boorishness is as ineradicable as the Italian's confidence in the brilliant future awaiting his own kingdom.

*June 14th.* Two days later the Coalition Ministry, which we pray fervently may remedy our shortage of war materials, was formed. Now, attention is turned towards the East, the



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Cameroons, the Dardanelles. Mr. Winston Churchill has raised our hopes to the tiptop of expectation with his mysterious promises of some unparalleled and crushing success in Gallipoli. So much so, that everyone speaks with confidence of the termination of the war within a few months.

Yesterday some were only restrained from hoisting flags by the desire to see the rumours confirmed. Alas! on opening the morning papers we were but greeted with the news of fresh Austrian successes.

*June 20th.* With the receipt of "Marching Orders" this morning, England and Home seemed suddenly very dear. Like a dream they come back, those places I have visited—the peaceful Lakes; the cheerful Felixstowe hotel, where one could revel in the soft, subdued lights and pretty frocks; Bedford, which with all its khaki seems to be playing at war more than any other city, and where one or two people are still extant who saw the Russians come through from Archangel at the beginning of operations, and even touched the snow on their caps! And the different country houses, the different friends, how little touched they seem by it all! True,



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in one or two once over-pretentious houses the food is less lavish, the staff less numerous, the clothes less exaggerated; which seemed a great improvement.

Only I seem changed, and all the things we once accepted as necessities of life are become luxuries, from books and baths to the once despised draught of clear cold water!

Yes, as to the sound of the soft-toned grand we sat by the fire enjoying the ever sweet smell of burning logs, whilst, with the inscrutable smile of one to whom the mysteries of Life and Death are revealed, the death mask of the woman who was found in the Seine looked down from her oak beam, and the hour-glass speeded its atoms along the road to eternity, for the first time France and work seemed anything but attractive.

*June 29th.* It is worth the journey to be amongst our men again, to be welcomed as they alone welcome one, with hearty handshakes and hopes that one has "come back to stay."

Things have progressed a good deal, too, in our small world. In the beginning, were one only rich enough, or endowed with a title sufficiently illustrious or notorious (it mattered not which), one

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might rent an hotel or a château, turn it into a French or Belgian Red Cross Hospital, and resort to a little harmless hospital work in France whenever London became boring.

True, the authorities never encouraged these little pleasure trips, but now that Boulogne has been definitely declared within the War Zone, entrance and egress are a very different matter, and it requires quite an amount of strategy for anyone not affiliated to some recognised society, and armed to the teeth with permits, to get here at all.

There seems also to have been a systematic "rounding up" of undesirables, and one by one the so-called "officers," who, in the beginning, had made the nights hideous with their champagne suppers, have disappeared.

Naturally, we too have progressed.

In place of skeleton buildings, well-planned camps lie along the shore, complete even to their Imperial red letter-boxes. Once swampy convalescent camps display smart flower gardens, whilst Thomas Atkins moves about less molested by demands for souvenirs, and somewhat solaced for his enforced absence from home by the welcome accorded to him by his Allies. If the average man's vocabulary does not run much

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beyond the five phrases, "*Bong jour!*" "*Compris?*" "*No bon!*" "*Nar poo!*" ("*Je ne peux pas!*") "*Promenade ce soir?*" the few exceptions have made remarkable progress.

One wonders what the residents of Brighton would say if a number of friendly French workmen erected all along the Downs a miniature village of asbestos and corrugated iron huts, interspersed with tents and planted with trim little gardens of bright flowers and evergreens; installed pillar-boxes bearing French arms, their electric power-station, their orderly- and mess-rooms, surrounded the whole by a mass of barbed wire, and having notified everywhere that this was Hospital No. —, to which there is "No Admittance," proceeded to explain smilingly to the bewildered Brightonians that the huts are stable enough to last for seven years.

If one could fathom the conflicting feelings of Brighton under these conditions, one might have some small understanding of the astonishment with which our Allies, already hard stricken by war, contemplate the problem of this little Britain in France.

And there certainly *are* problems. Take, for instance, the guarding of the roads. Naturally



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enough, even in the British War Zone the French are loath to give up command of the road. One cannot expect them to forget completely that only one hundred years ago we were on a hostile and not on a friendly mission! And so until recently they guarded the barriers with fixed bayonets. Alas! the valiant men whose zealous watch was apt to prove irksome have now been called up to the firing-line. We shall no longer be tempted (those of us who are facetiously inclined) to play pranks.

There was a certain art in producing, instead of one's military pass, a card of membership of some long-forgotten club or any legal-looking document, providing it bore a portrait affixed, and, brandishing it in the watchful guard's face with a loud "*Laissez-passer militaire*," dash on to one's destination. An old Hippodrome ticket has been known to act as well. Ten chances to one, being unable to read English, the guard would let one through, and the delay would be amply repaid by the good laugh.

But as I said, the many minor barriers have disappeared, and there is no bluffing the men who guard the entrance and egress to the town.

*June 30th.* Since the German introduction of



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methods of warfare that would shame a savage—the poison gas, the sinking of the *Lusitania*—the whole attitude of our men towards the enemy has changed, and one can safely predict that next Christmas there will be no exchange of civilities and cigarettes with the Huns as there was last.

Even at home the sluggards seem to be rousing; and the “Frightfulness” whereby the Germans hope to scare Britain into a compromise is, on the contrary, acting as a much-needed tonic.

One is struck out here by the psychology of the youthful subalterns. The high anticipation of “getting out,” the silent horror of which they say so little when they are brought face to face with the “Real Thing,” and which, once conquered, leads to a resigned fatalism.

It’s the same with all of them. “*Che sarà, sarà*, and if we *are* to be hit, well, the sooner it’s over the better, only it would be nice to know if it’s to be an arm, or sight or—the other thing. No matter, anyhow. We shall know it soon enough, and in the meantime there is that long-delayed ninety-six hours’ leave in the future to dream of——”

Aye, that leave that many of them will never get!

## CHAPTER X

**July, 1915**

*July 1st.* In place of the old hotel, where operations are still being carried on, our new hut has sprung up. The dimensions, let me see, are somewhere about 120 feet by 40 feet. Beside the platform at the far end lies the library, to fill which our store of books is to be greatly enlarged. Behind the counter are situated the ladies' room, the store-room, the mess-room, to beautify which I am busy all day making curtains, etc.

The kitchen is so small that it is not easy to get range and sink and boilers fitted in, but a patent coal-shed adjoining, by means of which one may shovel coal straight from the shed on to the fires through a lifting door, is a convenience. We glory in a bath for the resident secretaries, and if other sanitary accommodation is of the most primitive, we console ourselves that, being under military inspection, it is bound to be hygienic.

Our hut has the advantage of standing in its



OUR NEW HUT



INTERIOR OF A HUT

Behind the counter are situated the store-room and the mess-room





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own field, which, though none too even for cricket pitches, should make an excellent football ground, to popularise which we have decided to have a formal opening ceremony, preceded by sports.

In the interim of getting things ready for the hut I am lending a hand at an Expeditionary Force canteen. The work, being in a camp where all the men have been under fire, is intensely interesting. But, of course, the social element is lacking.

Apart from the amusements and distractions offered, the men seem to appreciate the Y.M.C.A. so much, because within the shelter of its walls they can forget for the moment the stringent military discipline under which they live.

*July 2nd.* In my hotel are quartered the latest "Lena Ashwell Concert Party," whose good humour keeps the whole place alive. The place is so noisy that it is impossible to sleep. Said the humorist of the party, "That reminds one of the tale of the man in an hotel who was greatly disturbed by someone walking about in the room above. The second night things were no better; the third, the place shook as if he were jumping the house down. Going upstairs he tapped at the

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door and said, 'I say, old fellow, do you mind letting me get a little sleep? You've kept me awake three nights with your noise.'

" 'Am I disturbing you?' came the rejoinder. 'I'm so sorry. You see, I'm under doctor's orders, and he's given me some medicine and told me to take it two nights running and skip the third! ' "

*July 3rd.* It is no easy matter now to get a photograph taken, even of so harmless a thing as a grave. Nevertheless, in reply to a request from a woman whose son is buried here, we resolved to leave no stone unturned to obtain the necessary permits. And, as we waited for the signing and countersigning of the valuable documents at the Commandant's office, whilst outside the "Caterpillars" rumbled past, taking their heavy guns up to the front, we wondered whether the same stringent regulations apply to the many "neutral" seamen, whose business, on cargo steamers, brings them into the port.

*July 9th.* By the evening the usual septic throat had claimed me victim, and in spite of strenuous efforts to attribute it to imagination, it

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is necessary to bow to the verdict that quarantines one as a "Query Diphtheria" case.

Faced with the idea of being isolated in a bathing-box ward and nursed by orderlies, there is nothing left for it but to take the landladies' advice and pray. Really, their faith is wonderful. They pray for everything; and seeing old Madame has a very short memory, and is always losing things for which she proceeds to pray without making the least effort to find them, St. Antony must be getting rather tired of this house!

Blinding rain in a jerry-built summer villa is not exactly cheerful, in spite of the Madonna lilies with which it is possible to adorn one's attic.

*July 15th.* The finishing touches are being put to the new building. My "Query Diphtheria" throat proved to be a false alarm, and now, having toiled for nine hours, behold me taking a moment's rest on the veranda, whilst thirty men—voluntary fatigue parties, who came in response to a hint that their assistance would be appreciated—are at work on different jobs.

Ten are darkening the table legs with permanganate of potash. Some are cleaning windows and others pasting on our "Dutch" frieze, whilst

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a little Scotty, who has been lent us as an orderly to help over these first days, and whose dialect is so broad that even his own compatriots sometimes fail to interpret, is watering and hanging geraniums we have had out from England. Yes, there is a breath of home about our hut. Bright English pottery adorns the shelves, bright curtains relieve the Mediterranean blue of the walls, and, as I said before, our plants, straight from Covent Garden, make the veranda as unwarlike as it is possible to make it.

*July 16th.* Our hut certainly opened with *éclat*! In spite of the fact that at midday the place was still full of French painters and workmen, we managed to be superficially in order by four o'clock when the D.D.M.S. declared the building open.

No sooner had the decorators laid down their tools at midday for lunch than we bundled their ladders and paints outside and set to work to get the hall straight.

In spite of the rain and biting wind, our campaign for opening with sports in the afternoon was carried through; and after the many kindly speeches and wishes for the welfare of the work, I



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distributed the prizes from the platform, and we concluded with a concert.

*July 18th.* And now we are all suffering from a disease that might be called "Hut fever"; its symptoms, a readiness to do anything to get the place in order and (in spite of the still wet green paint that leaves anyone who is careless enough to lean against the doors a souvenir not easily eradicated) to make it into the finest centre at the Base.

The men themselves are equally enthusiastic, and one of them, the local versifier, brought us a poem penned for the occasion, which I quote as it stands :

*" There's poets come and poets go,  
You've heard of that no doubt,  
But guess before you've heard much more—  
You'll want to throw me out.  
But still, here goes ; I'll really try  
And get outside the rut,  
By putting into time and rhyme  
The tale of OUR NEW HUT.*

*"What sauce to call it ' ours ' I hear  
A few outsiders say.  
But we don't mean we own the scheme —  
No, not a bit that way.*

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

*We only mean it's our new home  
It's the best way to put  
Our thoughts about this new turn out  
We've christened OUR NEW HUT.*

*" Now if perchance in Wimereux  
You're looking for a treat,  
Step off the road to our abode  
And kindly take a seat.  
You'll find it filled with khaki boys,  
From ploughman to the knut.  
But men of any mob, hob-nob  
Alright, in OUR NEW HUT.*

*" I haven't got their names off pat ;  
These ladies and the gents,  
Whose active work they never shirk,  
No matter what events.  
But I feel sure we'll bless their help  
When peaceful lives we strut,  
And trust that in our lives, survives  
The good from OUR NEW HUT."*

Thus the American journalist who called on us to-day won our hearts completely by designating the hut as the "Grosvenor Square of Boulogne."

The place is kept lively by the Canadians, who are stationed close by, and who, with their music and overseas songs that carry one straight out on to the prairies of "God's Own Country," never leave us a dull moment.

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Their ideas of justice, however, are rudimentary and original. To-day the French girl whom, in default of an orderly, we keep to do the rough work, was in trouble. She is an odd little creature of about twenty-six, eternally brandishing imaginary knives at an imaginary husband who ill-treats her. "The Little Savage" (thus we dubbed her because of the way in which she holds her food in her mouth and tears at it with both hands) had put her beautiful two-year-old boy out to nurse when she came to work, and, on returning to see him, discovered that he had been kidnapped by her parents-in-law.

After much ado with the police, and searching and wrangling at relatives' houses, it transpired that, owing to her own peccadilloes, the poor creature could not claim the custody of her child.

Crying like a wild thing, brandishing her helpless little fists, calling down invectives against the laws whose aid, only a few hours previously, she had been invoking, the girl returned; as I stood there, trying to bring her to her senses with soothing words and a cup of coffee, one of the Canadians came up and listened, open-mouthed, to her story.

"Give me the child's address," he exclaimed, his great solemn eyes fixed on the hysterical girl.

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

“ Law or no laws, it’s hers. I’ll steal it back for her and brain that rotten husband when he comes out of the trenches—and anyone else who gets in the way! ”

Although there are so many tales illustrative of the Canadian lack of class distinction being told on all sides, I cannot refrain from noting down one told me by a Canadian to-day who fails utterly to see the humour of it. A certain important general came along to a Canadian camp to see his friend who was in command.

“ Well, and what do *you* want? ” asked the private on guard at the entrance.

“ I want to see Colonel Birkdale,” replied the General.

The private raised his voice. “ Say, Birkdale,” he shouted, “ come right here, there’s a general wants to see you! ”

“ What else could he do? ” asked the narrator of me. “ He couldn’t go off and fetch the old man if he was on guard, could he?”

*July 23rd.* In spite of the conquest of German South-West Africa and the advance of four hundred yards in Gallipoli, the situation seems as indefinite as ever. Yet in the lull on the West is to be felt



July, 1915

the presaging of the advance, in anticipation of which we live on the tip-top of expectation. This time there will be no shortage of ammunition, they tell us; but, as Mr. Asquith says, we must "Wait and see!" In the meantime we are less busy, and able to enjoy exhilarating walks along the hospital-lined shore; or inland, to where that ruined Jesuit monastery that has sheltered so many Indians and figured so often in the papers as the "Ruins of Ypres," to rejoice the heart of an unsuspecting public, rises an impressive pile against the sky.

Everywhere one notes the comparative opulence of our men, drawing from 1s. 2d. to 6s. per day, as compared with the French soldiers, who, less well nurtured, only receive  $\frac{1}{2}$ d.!

And if the tremendous wastage that went on during the early months has now ceased; if loaves and meat are no longer buried in large quantities daily, at least one could find quite a number of poverty-stricken French families able to subsist happily on the "leavings" of the camps hard by.

*July 29th.* I cannot help recalling how surprised everyone looked at home if I spoke of "Blighty," or a friend who was now a T.C.O. (Train Conducting Officer), and another who had

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

been promoted to D.D.M.S. (Deputy Director Medical Supplies). I believe they thought it "swank," though they themselves had added "strafig" and "hating" (in the European-war sense) to their vocabulary.

Let us do ourselves justice! We at the Base are so accustomed to our own "jargon" that it comes as second nature to us.

We are often asked for "a cup of you and me and a wad" (tea and bit of bread and butter), or told that, although a man has spent all his "toot" (money) on "pig's ear" (beer), he would be glad of a pinch of "Lot's wife" (table salt) to eat with a sandwich, as the "shakles" (stew) was so undercooked as to be uneatable; and I defy *anyone* not to lose reckoning of the rights and wrongs of their own language when every other man states his wants in a terminology of his own. "Five steps to heaven" is, perhaps, the favourite term for Woodbines; "Cape of Good Hope" stands for soap; "jankers," confinement to barracks.

And is not every third office blazoned with hieroglyphics of some sort? Does not every third man wear some kind of distinctive brassard with its distinctive letters?

## CHAPTER XI

August, 1915

*August 3rd.* Two Canadian A.M.C. orderlies were grouching that they hadn't left God's Own Country to sit twiddling their thumbs in Boulogne. "We volunteered for active service," says one. "Can't you picture it years hence," says the second. "Your children around you asking, like the little boy in the picture, 'And what did *you* do in the great war, Daddy?'" "Scrubbed floors, my son!"

They did not grouse in vain. Two days later they were drafted to Gallipoli, where no doubt they will see all the active service their brave young souls demand—and a good deal more, perhaps. They must be magnificent fighters, these Colonials, whose regime allows of their initiative having full scope.

*August 12th.* Yesterday the mail boat came in accompanied by two destroyers.

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

“Royalty is coming,” clamoured the French. “Royalty is expected,” echoed the men. And, having received an intimation three days back that Royalty was expected, we awaited developments in our best workaday frocks.

Presentation at their Majesties’ Court is a simple matter compared with the excitement of receiving a Princess in France. I do not wish to infer that the Princess was anything but her charming Royal self!

It was the long retinue that preceded and succeeded her, the curiosity of our French friends as to *who* was coming (curiosity that we in the know were not permitted to satisfy), the air of breathless expectancy, that made the visit and inspection a thing to be remembered. And in due course, the usual formalities being over, the presentations effected, our handiwork admired, we were left with the King’s cheering message to rejoice the hearts of those of us who are already beginning to feel so tired and war worn.

“His Majesty sent an especial message to you workers in France, and desired me to tell you he considers the fine work you are carrying on so efficiently, of importance second only to that of the men in the trenches.”



## August, 1915

It was certainly a sufficient encouragement to "carry on."

*August 13th.* For a long time now we have hankered after some words to express all the heroism, the practical heroism, manifested around us. And when some Good Samaritan at home sent out a volume of Rupert Brooke's poems, it may be imagined how we acclaimed him forerunner of the poets who shall sing the greatest tragedy of history.

Almost simultaneously appeared the *Times* supplement of war poems. For a year now we have lived outside the charmed sphere of books, and these documents came as a revelation of the depths to which the cataclysm has moved our singers. We had thought them dumb by reason of its magnitude.

Kipling, we had been told, was "dead," so far as his influence over the nation went; but *can* the influence of the man who wrote "For all we have and are" die whilst his nation endures?

It may not be great poetry, but it is great patriotism.

And then there is the new school of poets who have arisen—new to us, that is to say—and who

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

we are told may be heard reading their own poems every week in London in the mystical precincts of the poetry bookshops.

*August 17th.* We are working single-handed now. That is to say, whilst one lady is on leave a second is *hors de combat* with a bad leg, and, owing to the I.G.O. authorities' stringent regulations by which free lances (if there are any to be found) may not be pressed into service, there are only two of us, which makes it hard work.

And at home we hear of huts where the workers are tumbling over each other for numbers!

Perhaps one of the most interesting figures in this medley of men is a certain South African veteran, a blind V.C., the value of whose work amongst the wounded is immeasurable.

I last saw him being led down by a brother officer to the supper-room after a diplomatic Court at Buckingham Palace. *Then* all eyes were turned on him in pity; *now* one realises that the vast amount of good that this one man has been able to achieve—cheering on fellow-sufferers not yet accustomed to their affliction, showing men how it is possible to build up a new though sight-

## August, 1915

less life—must have made his own suffering worth while.

The men worship him, and one word of good cheer from him is worth more than the ministration of a dozen clergymen.

On the whole the visits of the clergy are not hailed with much enthusiasm, their arrival being often looked upon as an omen of approaching death at the Base, or, in the firing-line, of a big advance.

*August 23rd.* A French orchestra was playing yesterday afternoon, and on the cliffs that form the lawns of No. — Stationary Hospital were gathered together to greet the Royal guest the most fashionable crowd that the Base could produce. The whole scene, but for the white tents and blue-clad patients, might have been a smart seaside parade, for the camp commands an exquisite view of Boulogne, Wimereux and the distant coast of home. Suddenly, with a boom, a spurt of blackened debris, and a jet of water house-high, a distant boat was seen slowly to heel over and turn turtle.

Some attributed the cause to a floating mine, others to an ill-judged practice gun; but as the

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

mail boat has neither come in nor gone out, as everyone is full of the sinking of the *Arabic*, we begin to believe the worst rumours—that a German submarine has at last got through into the Channel.

Later on, at an official dinner, the truth had not yet been fathomed.

That dinner is, perhaps, worthy of note, as for the first time we heard our Indian colleagues' views on the European upheaval.

Having exhausted my conversational powers with my dinner partner—a brawny Yorkshireman in a violent check suit and correspondingly odd accent, whose conversation for the most part consisted in repeatedly and dolefully asking if I knew what was the rate of exchange for the day (for the edification of posterity, be it noted, it is 27 francs 50 centimes)—I turned my attention to the native Christian Indian on my right. He was by no means lacking in topics of interest, chief amongst them being the effects of war upon India of the future. He spoke with the assurance of a man of education, being a barrister, and seemed to think that the broadening effect of their sojourn in Europe will be counteracted by the native adoption of Western vices.



August, 1915

An interesting fact to note is the total paralysation of all religious propagandist movements amongst the Indians. The work of the Y.M.C.A. amongst the natives at the moment is entirely non-religious. The secretaries act as interpreters, letter-writers, entertainers; they have evolved a wonderful system for keeping the men in touch with their kinsfolk—but any proselytising is strictly barred by the Army.

Not by even so much as the use of Y.M.C.A. notepaper—that might lead the natives at home to suspect their warriors of being influenced—is this verdict waived.

Nevertheless, it seems that the Indians have come to look upon the Association as “both father and mother,” to use my informant’s phrase, and turn to it for assistance in most peculiar matters. Said a Sikh to a local secretary to-day :

“Sahib, you go into town?”

“Yes.”

“Sahib, I have one want.”

“What is it?”

“Sahib, will you buy me two new teeth?”

*August 30th.* To counteract our little success at Hooge there is the news of the fall of Warsaw,

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of Ivangorod, and Brest Litovsk ; while in Gallipoli a new landing at Suvla Bay and General Birdwood's advance at Anzac brings us such a list of casualties that we can only hope the venture is worth the cost.

Where, I wonder, is the crushing success Mr. Winston Churchill promised us, for which people at home were preparing to hang out their flags?

## CHAPTER XII

**September, 1915**

*September 3rd.* Time has passed so quickly that it is hard to realise that beautiful autumn is already upon us. Yet as the days draw in, lights go on earlier, and our hut grows fuller and work more engrossing. Outside the laughing, gurgling wavelets, chasing each other round the rocks, are replaced by white-crested breakers that rage along the shore at high tide and cut us off from the town.

Boulogne is once more animated, as people transfer their attention during leisure hours from country pursuits to the joys of the shops, whose windows give forth an enticing glow.

Our hut being the most easily cleared and converted into a concert hall, it was decided to hold a performance there entirely for nursing sisters.

About four hundred of them turned up, and, in spite of the difficulties of getting sufficient cars

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to convey them backwards and forwards, it proved a great success.

The morning before we had spent in trying vainly to get the place into hospital-like order, so that even their critical eyes might have no fault to find. It is extraordinary how many obstacles stood in our way. For in France women scrubbers *never* go on their knees to work, their method of cleaning a floor being to flood it with water and chloride of lime, and having vaguely played about with mops on the end of a long broom, to leave it severely alone; and as, long before the place has had a chance to dry, it is being tramped on by men in muddy boots, the results are disastrous, to say the least of it.

Nor is it at all easy to get rid of the refuse of the place, which has either to be consigned to the incinerator, buried in trenches, or carted away; and although the mayor's cart *sometimes* condescends to call once a week, it usually takes a good deal of persuasion.

*September 12th.* A day off duty is best begun by a swim. To float on the warm, pellucid waves, rejoicing in the sun and breeze, is to be alive. The next item on the programme is to look up old



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friends. This is not altogether without disappointment, for they are all, like oneself, "war worn" and beginning to be pessimistic. Many are on the verge of a nervous breakdown, owing to the isolation of their position (it is quite a tragedy in itself to note the number of people who can't afford to have friends); others, and quite a number, have found solace in religion and have turned Catholic, being baptised in the Cathedral that has watched so many changes these last months.

From home come letters full of Zeppelin raids. Squadrons of these must have come, according to descriptions. Everyone claims to have had them "just over our street."

*September 20th.* We are glad to see the pest of flies and wasps abating at last. May that wonderfully efficient sanitary inspector—the bane of so many people's lives!—whose unflagging zeal has rendered this disease-ridden neighbourhood quite a passable health resort be honoured and sung as he deserves. The construction of baths and laundries are minute details compared with the difficulties of coping with drainage and flies.

Owing to the prevalence of the cesspool system

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here, the French authorities permit only of creolin as disinfectant; and, in spite of effluvia, none of the ordinary deodorants is allowed. Then, quite recently and with no warning, to cope with the shortage of water, the contaminated water of the Odra River was let in to supplement the ordinary supply, and we were served with notices to the effect that all water used (1) for drinking, (2) for washing up cups, plates, cooking utensils, etc., (3) for cleaning teeth, must be either boiled or chlorinated, with many other regulations calculated to counteract the idiosyncrasies of contaminated water.

*Revenons à nos moutons*—and our flies! For was I not about to pen an anthem on all the fly traps, papers, cemeteries and fly poisons that are our daily consternation?

Each morning for months past every dish has been covered by fresh muslin covers, whilst sandwiches are stored under wire safes, and harmless-looking but efficacious baits of creolin, hidden in seemingly innocuous saucers of milk and sugar, are set nightly, oblivious of the indignant buzzing of their victims. Congested traps full of wasps meet their fate in buckets of boiling water, whilst those dangling fly-spangled creations, whose un-

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pleasant habit it is to smite the unwary when least expected, leaving an unwanted "souvenir" of sticky, jam-like substance on his face or hair, are consigned in all their odorous glory to the fire.

Oh yes! our sanitary inspector is as much a tartar on the score of flies as he is on drainage and the boiling of milk.

Only the other day, whilst inspecting the kitchen of a neighbouring hospital, a typical incident occurred. Grunting his approval of everything, the Major was about to take his departure when his eye lighted upon a solitary fly which, having evaded all efforts at capture, was crawling upon the ceiling.

"Adjutant!" roared the Major, "what's that fly doing there?"

Completely taken aback, the Adjutant faltered in trepidation: "I don't know, sir, to be sure. But I'll ask the Sergeant-Major!"

*September 25th.* Now are all things explained—the massed cavalry, the convoys, the ammunition wagons we saw on a surreptitious journey we made up the line; the "Something" in the air, the expectation of the small and restless audience at a concert we had this afternoon. For the great



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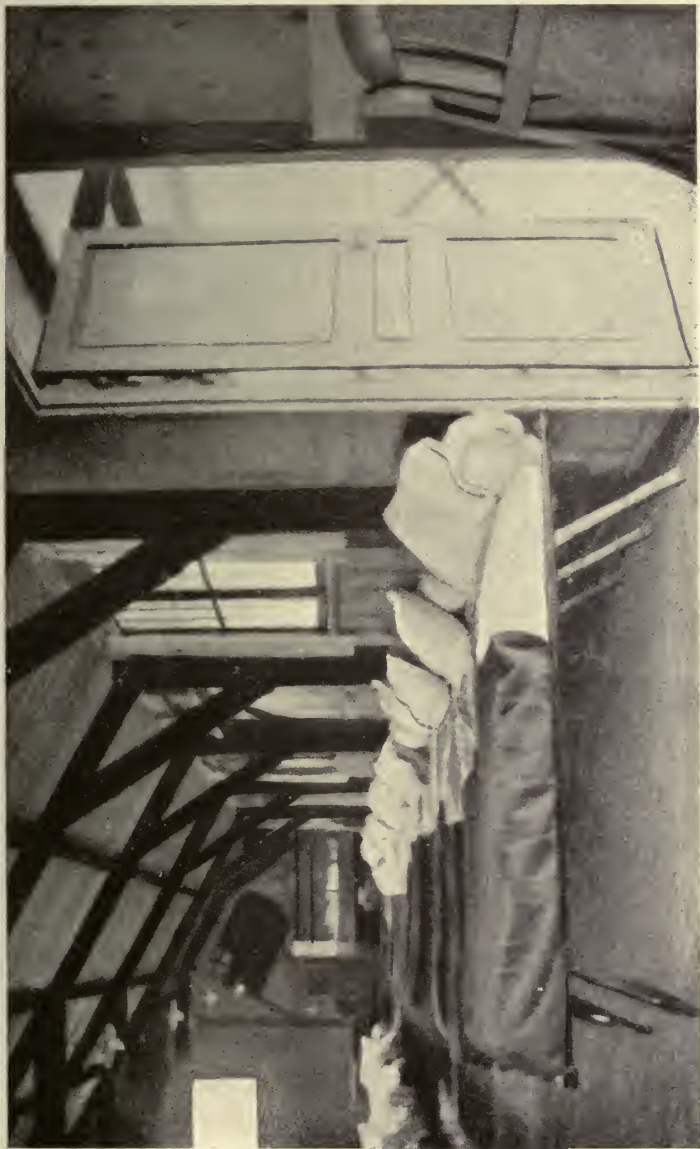
“Push” has begun, and fifteen thousand wounded are expected down here alone, and to cope with the work every available nook and cranny has been converted into hospital accommodation.

It was about 9.30 P.M., just as we were finishing our evening repast, that there came a tap on the shutters. There stood a polite but hurried C.O. asking courteously for the *loan* of our building, which he has every right to commandeer.

*September 26th.* A dreary “gun rain” has set in, but nothing can damp the spirits of the men—for rumour has it we have advanced five miles along the whole line, with a magnificent cavalry charge; and the 3,000 prisoners brought down to-day clearly point to a crushing victory.

*September 29th.* A complete change has been wrought, and as I sit in the library gazing across the sea of beds where lie the weary bandaged forms, towards the counter, upon which rise the pile of surgical instruments and other paraphernalia of sickness, the old smell, so familiar a year ago, of blood-covered beings, whose clothes have been time and again drenched through and dried on them, comes to me.





### EXTEMPORISED HOSPITAL IN A HUT

"Fifteen thousand wounded are expected down here alone, and to cope with the work every available nook and cranny has been converted into a hospital."



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The place has been scoured out, and makes an excellent ward, but for the elements, whose fierceness baffles all efforts to heat the interior.

Apart from the wounded there is no denying that Thomas Atkins has a strong penchant for stuffy rooms. Maybe it is the reaction after months of enforced outdoor life, but the fact remains that if he *can* shut every door and window, and huddle round a fireplace instead of enjoying the fresh air, he will, without fail, continue to do so.

Icy blasts penetrate the cracks of the unlined wooden wall, rain pours through the ventilators—which the French workmen had unthinkingly built inwards—quite oblivious of the fact that the sleeping figures on the beds are deserving of more consideration. We have just put red lampshades on to mellow the light, and even have dreams of varnishing the floor one day, when things are slack.

Outside, in the marquee devoted to the storage of our tables and usual equipment, we are carrying on our own work—at a disadvantage, to be sure—but still carrying on, to facilitate which an extemporary boiler has been erected near the door.

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In the kitchen, where daily we are gleaning undreamt-of wisdom on the scores of ration-drawing, diet sheets, order forms, chaos would reign but for the continual presence of one of us. For the two French girls and two orderlies are tumbling over each other in their anxiety to get things done up to time. As it is, things work admirably, and we are all growing adepts at brandishing heavy meat choppers and cooking in the cauldrons and stewpots, so large that no two women can move them.

We stewed 30 kilos of meat, with vegetables, this morning, and served it at 12.15. As we cut up their meat for the handless and armless, they were as unanimous in their appreciation of the food as we had been in our admiration of the excellent ration beef, of which each man is entitled to ten ounces. We can only attribute the men's grouching to the fact that it may sometimes be insufficiently cooked. Better meat and vegetables were surely never served before a king.

*September 30th.* As far as possible only the slight cases are sent to us, so that the work amongst the fit may go on as usual.

Amongst the lying-down cases is a man with



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a bullet through the pelvis, a gaunt Irishman of a strange hue, who, whilst wounded, had been gassed by one of our own explosive shells.

“Look at them raindrops,” said he. “That’s ’ow the bullets fell, thick as that.”

“The wonder ain’t the number of casualties, it’s that anyone could live through it,” rejoined another.

“But we were through the fifth line o’ their trenches and fightin’ in the open when I come down,” adds a third, his eyes gleaming with the light of victory that betokens that it was all worth while.

The achievement of our men seems all the more wonderful when one hears how they were not only outnumbered and outflanked, but, in many parts of the line, lacking in ammunition, which they maintain had to be held in reserve for the main attack.

As the dressings were being done by the solitary nurse and doctor in charge, as one by one the wounds were attended to, and a silence pregnant with unuttered groans reigned, one felt vividly that none but Michelangelo himself could depict that scene—those fine, muscular forms looming in the dim morning light.

## CHAPTER XIII

October, 1915

*October 3rd.* All the morning we had been hard at work amongst our *blessés*. It is odd how soon they endear themselves to everyone. There is the little wizened bit of humanity who gazes all day long into space with a horror-stricken look, or falls asleep, half on the floor, half on the bed, until aroused. The unearthly green pallor of his face is not accounted for by his slum upbringing alone, but by the German gas and the fact that he has twice been blown heavenwards by exploding mines. There is the finely built Canadian—one of the first contingent who have all “seen hell with the lid off,” to use their own terminology—who, when the pain of his rheumatic limbs allows, is so very precise in his toilet. He changes his shirt frequently, gloating over the neatly folded bundles in which repose his requisites with the air of a miser, never forgetting to clean his boots and call for a glass by which to shave. He is “some”

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smart, and, judging by the crested seal and gold watch-chain dangling from his waistcoat pocket, must be a sahib at home. To us he is most remarkable for his expression—the grimmest I have ever seen.

Then there is the “buffoon” of the place, who yarns lengthily about the four times he has been hit (though his record only points to once), and invariably sets out to sing comic songs when the rest of the community is preparing to sleep.

The men are full of their glimpses of enemy trenches and methods; of how they found quite a number of Germans chained to their own machine-guns, which reminds me of the most dramatic side of warfare.

Very little is told of courts martial, very little is known of courts martial, except to those whose duties bring them in contact with the relentlessness of discipline. To realise one must see.

Until quite recently a blue-eyed, fair-haired boy lay in the end bed of an airy ward in B—Hospital. In spite of his extreme reticence he won the affection of both nurses and patients. His wound was healing quickly, but he only shook his head when they spoke of getting home.

One day as dinner was being taken round

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he asked for a second helping of meat and pudding.

“Why, whatever is the matter?” exclaimed the kindly nurse. “Are you very hungry?”

“Not very, Sister; but it’s my last dinner!” came the quiet answer.

Not understanding, the Sister repeated the remark to the Medical Officer.

It was quite true. The boy’s wounds were self-inflicted. It was a case for court martial. Next day he was gone.

*October 10th.* It was in the midst of serving out the dinners that two friends turned up on their way home to England.

Hungry and travel-stained though they were, we were too busy to do more than hurl a frying-pan and eggs into their hands, with injunctions to help themselves until the rush was over and we could attend to them. How they admired our ward and its now stained, polished floors, for which we found a solution of brunswick black and turpentine so efficacious! The afternoon being slack, we hied into the town to pay a long promised visit to a naval friend, and were entertained right royally, enjoying to the full the childish pleasure



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of having to scale ungainly ladders from boat to boat, and listening to the conversation between our host and the ship's captain in a jargon edifying but utterly incomprehensible to the mere landlubber.

We wandered round the quay, along the roads on which stand well-guarded, but by no means hidden, 5-inch guns, their attendant "caterpillars," and, in the trains, loads of ammunition. As we watched cranes lifting great weapons of destruction off the boats the significance of this war of cold steel against quivering human flesh was borne upon us. We sauntered round, marveling at the wonderful method by which, in less than a year, the British have created a whole small city out of nothing.

Gangs of khaki-clad workmen dwell here, utterly oblivious, no doubt, of the wonderful sunsets and Turner-esque light effects as they work amidst the stores of rations destined daily for the trenches, or the picric acid, petrol and other explosives that lie by the sea.

My friends' enthusiastic anticipation of home was infectious, and it needed much will-power to withstand their pleadings to get leave too. And as the boat that carried them home grew into a

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

faint speck on the horizon, involuntarily our thoughts went with them, past the brightly coloured villas, for all the world like the sugar-candy edifices of fairy-tales, to the land where nothing is changed. Yes! There are hours when one would gladly relinquish the necessities of life for a few of its luxuries. Chief and foremost of these, needless to say, would be an unlimited supply of those hot baths we were wont to accept as our birthright, and are only just beginning to value at their true worth. I wonder if anyone who has not spent a bleak winter in the jerry-built summer residences of a French watering-place, whose eyes have not been continually offended by the salmon-pink walls and hideous rococo cupids on low ceilings, can realise the true joy of living once more in a house, no matter how modest, but a house built to withstand the weather?

*October 13th.* The British advance on the outskirts of Hulluch—the village of Loos, the progress near Hooze, the French capture of that ghastly Souchez cemetery, their valiant fighting in Champagne, are things of the past. It is the Hohenzollern Redoubt that is on everyone's lips now, and Vermelles. Our own men—the hospital

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orderlies, that is to say—who spend all their spare moments at the hut, are quite worn out by this rush of work, which nevertheless seems to have put new life into them.

Many grouse at the R.A.M.C. Few people realise the deference due to those devoted men who, day and night, are working to alleviate suffering. They number amongst their ranks many well-born men, who joined that corps at the first call in the hopes of “getting out soon,” and many who gave up excellent posts to enlist are undergoing undreamt-of hardships with a stoicism that is admirable.

After all, which lot is preferable? That of the man who, after running risks in the trenches for six days, finds himself in billets the succeeding week, able to enjoy his liberty with the consciousness of having earned it—or the man who has had steadily to perform the same menial jobs for fifteen unrelieved months, running no risk, it is true, save that of infection, but subject to the obloquy of those he is serving because he has never been in the trenches? As an R.A.M.C. orderly, who has made three unsuccessful attempts to transfer into a combatant unit, remarked to-day, the Base has well been described as “the place



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where they keep you until you are so fed up that the Front is a treat!"

A hundred temptations assail them, and men who had never before felt the least inclination towards drink find themselves drifting by degrees into those enticing-looking little French cafés not yet closed by the authorities.

And it is to detract from the attractions of these dens that we work to keep the men amused.

Said one onlooker to-day pityingly: "I hear you have such a bad set of men—drunkards and all sorts of undesirables!"

With truth I could rejoin: "Not nearly bad enough. It's the worst we want, for they need helping most."

*October 19th.* There is no end to the gamut of emotions one traverses during the space of an ordinary day. To close one's eyes and look back over the kaleidoscopic events of the week is almost bewildering.

The picture of Second Lieutenant Jones, lately junior clerk at Messrs. Morells, steamship owners, being brought face to face with his former employer, Sir Cuthbert Morell, private, A.S.C., is inexpressibly funny.



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Private Morell accords the Tommy's salute to his officer, who seems to have lost all his customary swagger and starch for the moment.

Lieutenant Jones stops. "I—I hope you're getting on all right—sir," he stammers.

The grey-haired private, master of millions, with shooting-boxes, country seats, town houses that a prince might envy, replies to his £100 per annum clerk and superior officer that all is well. For a moment they gaze at each other speechless. Then the topsy-turvydom of it all grows too much for them, and, to the astonishment of the onlooker, the adjutant of Jones's regiment, they burst into a roar of laughter that, contrary to all military etiquette, ends in a hearty handshake.

*October 20th.* Whilst we were still a hospital, and our work temporarily paralysed, a new hut was opened. In a state of great indignation some of the men clustered round to reassure us as to their patriotism to the old place.

"You needn't fear no rivalry," exclaimed one; "they've got the wrong class o' person doon there."

"This is *our* hut, and you make us feel as if

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

we belonged to the place and it to us," said another.

If their loyalty warmed our hearts, it did not in the least facilitate the task of explanation that our Association fears no rivalry, that it is not attempting to run a cheap café, and rather than be thought to outbid anyone else would pack up its traps and depart.

Such is the spirit of the institution for which we are working. And perhaps I may whisper it in my diary that in one place, when some unscrupulous folk were bribing unwary men with free drinks to spread abroad that the Association tea was of an inferior quality to theirs, with their truly magnanimous spirit the Y.M.C.A. *did* walk out of the camp, and yet continued to supply the said unscrupulous folk with all the stores they required.

Oh, yes, we're all inordinately proud to be working under the sign of the Red Triangle!

Many, no doubt, have used the institution for the purpose of gratifying their curiosity, more as a means of playing their rôle in the Great Game, and most, maybe, will sever their connection with the Association to which they owe so much with the cessation of hostilities; but those who have

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been vouchsafed an insight into the methods of the Y.M.C.A., the dominating spirit that has driven it into the position of responsibility it now holds—in face of the derision with which its rise was first greeted—will not forget that the Y.M.C.A. has never yet failed where it was most needed, never shown anything but the greatest magnanimity of spirit. Entirely undenominational, it throws its doors open to every sect under the sun, its buildings have been lent to Jews and Catholics, Mohammedans and others alike; and just *because* of its broadness and the largeness of its vision it is having an evangelising power undreamt of by any religious inquisition of the Middle Ages. There will be many, after this war, who will be able to say :

“I grew religious because I saw what a wonderful thing active religion can be”; and though the members of this Association—which has a way of giving the humbler born leaders of men an opportunity of leading—may never hear of all this, it will be inscribed to their favour on the Day of Reckoning! And surely the very silence of its workings is sufficient testimony of its strength, as its growth is of its utility.

Does the world know, I wonder, how daily



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improvised centres are springing up nearer and nearer the Front, to the men's delight, until the old familiar sign of the Red Triangle—not Bass's Pale Ale, be it noted—but the Red Triangle, that symbolises "Body, Mind and Spirit," is to be found even in dug-outs?

Nor is the institution behindhand in Egypt or the Near East or Gallipoli.

Only to-day we heard of a secretary (originally here with the Indian force) who, on landing at Gallipoli, was greeted by the C.O. with a cheerful :

"And what are you looking for?"

"A place with no shells flying about, sir, to start a Y.M. centre!"

"Why, that's what everyone on the Peninsula is looking for!" exclaimed the Colonel. "If you can find it, by all means keep it!"

*October 28th.* All things considered, the resignation of the French Ministry is causing far less comment here than such a move in England would make, though in Paris we hear there is quite an upheaval. Internal politics in France are so entirely subservient to the international issues at stake.



October, 1915

One would not want those at home to know all there is to know of modern warfare—of the vast pestilential graveyard that is Belgium—yet one cannot help wishing that some of the vibrations of these strenuous times could be more clearly felt by them, that they would cease to see things as they wish to see them, and realise that the worst is yet to come—that we must brace ourselves to face it.

Not only the spirits of the fallen heroes of our little insignificant Western Front cry out to be avenged, not only the scarce human prisoners, dying in hundreds of cold and hunger in disease-ridden concentration camps; the girl mothers of Belgium, the murdered innocents, the crucified Canadians; men burned by liquid fire, suffocated by poison gas, parched men dying of thirst on the arid plains of the East; but every forbear of our gallant race warns us that the end is not yet, that to safeguard the future of our children the nation must turn its whole attention to the work in hand.

How can we blame the slackers who, for want of confidence, refused to throw in their lot with what seems to them a wild-goose chase—until fetched? We must blame the slothful system

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that allows one man to profit by another's patriotism.

We must not lay the blame of any one failure at the door of any one particular man, but attribute it to the fault we are most often apt to exalt as a virtue—as if by so doing we exonerated our mistakes—our slack unpreparedness.

Surely, until we are animated by one great unity of purpose, one great desire to sink personal in national interests, even as our dead heroes have done, there can be no end.

Surely if our Russian Allies could achieve in one day what reformers had scarce hoped to see effected in a hundred years, and by one fell swoop convert herself into an abstemious country, animated with but one desire—to conquer—we should be able to attain a little more unity, a little less slackness?

*October 29th.* The news of the King's accident whilst reviewing the troops is the one thing one hears discussed on all sides. Exactly where he will be taken seems as yet indefinite, but the orderlies from the Officers' Hospital opposite are fully convinced that *their* wards are being prepared for his reception. The French seem almost as

October, 1915

upset as we are, for their love of our Royalty remains as stanch as during the life of King Edward, whom they worshipped, and the Prince of Wales—of whom we have caught an occasional glimpse on his way to and from the Front—vies in popularity with his genial grandfather.

## CHAPTER XIV

November, 1915

*November 2nd, All Souls' Day!* The Bishop of Arras held a service in the cemetery, a memorial service for those *morts pour la Patrie*.

The rain streamed down from the steel-grey sky in Boulognese torrents as the mass surged hither and thither amongst the crowded graves.

Those graves into which but a year ago we watched the dead being heaped three deep, into which we cast our meagre offering of violets with a wish that those relatives at home might know that at least two English souls were there to pray for them lovingly at the end, are now old graves and planted with neat little boxwood crosses.

Oh! city of little white crosses on that high hill, what a history of pain and valour you stand for!

The bishop came late. Some feared the weather might deter him; others scoffed at the idea.



November, 1915

“ A bishop who has faced the fighting with his people in the field, who has watched his whole diocese gradually destroyed, will not fear the rain ! ” they said.

Addressing a few words of thanks to the crowd for being present, the bishop hastily robed. The choir chanted. A new young widow beside me began to sob. Scarce an eye in that vast concourse of black and uniforms was dry.

“ *Requiescat in pace !* ”

It seemed to me that no passed souls could be so needful of that prayer as the restless, tortured souls of the living mourning crowd.

An irresistible something drew me once more towards the now deserted hospital on the quay. It had *had* to be abandoned for reasons of hygiene. For even after the rise of its now celebrated dental, ocular and aural departments, even when the lavatories and baths and X-ray apparatus had been satisfactorily installed, its situation—low down by the sluggish water—its lack of proper ventilation, made it untenable, and within the space of a few days it was transferred to healthier quarters facing the sea and refreshed by sun and breezes, where there was no fear of the low fever that continually attacked the staff in that original charnel-house.

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

Once more it is an evil-smelling empty barn. I clapped my hands to my eyes to see if I was awake. *Could* this ever have been the place we knew, the harbour of so much pain! Oh, could those white-washed walls and dirty floors speak! No tales of massacre could be more lurid than the remembrance of the original British Expeditionary Force who passed through and will not come again. In spite of the dead stillness that reigned I could feel the throbbing of the many souls who passed away. Vividly, as if no intervening year had elapsed, their faces rose up to greet me with cries for water and release from pain, whilst eager blue-ticketed crowds pressed forward as the arrival of a hospital ship was announced.

A rat ran across the concrete, emphasising the desolation of the scene. Out of the gloom of a certain corner the spirit of a nameless prisoner greeted me. With a last tetanus spasm—a writhe—a death-rattle—the jaw relaxed like a gaping fish, and a strange little sigh seemed to betoken a released spirit.

The mortuary door was blacked over. Why not removed? For what purpose could such a place ever be used again? The theatres still stood—deprived of their hardly accumulated equip-

November, 1915

ment. A sigh of wind came through a broken pane. Was it imagination, or did it bear with it faintly from afar the old oft-heard cry: "Christ help us!"

Bah! It was but an evil nightmare. *They* are all gone. I alone am left to tell the tale; and generations to come will never know.

Outside things are not much changed. The cobblestones, responsible for the premature demise of such innumerable pairs of stout boots and shoes, are as uneven as ever. The best part of the road, however, has now been railed off for the use of ambulances only, in order that the wounded may be subjected to as little jolting as possible. I recall how, after our first few days at the Gare Maritime Hospital, one of the nurses discovered an easier method of getting from our billets to our work, and how the half-hour's walk to the hospital was soon superseded by a ten-minutes' row in one of the many ferryboats from one side of the harbour to the other. Sometimes, of course, it had been too rough. Once, indeed, there was nearly a calamity when an old boatman, rather more anxious for the welfare of his pocket than the safety of his passengers, ventured out in a storm so violent that the little boat was in danger



## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

of being swamped by the waves, and necessitated the putting out of the lifeboat, or whatever is the Boulognese equivalent. Even then the strong current proved almost too much for the frail craft, which was gradually drifting seawards. For several days afterwards most of us risked extra weary feet rather than face the elements at sea.

Sometimes, of course, we obtained a lift in an ambulance or private car, for even to-day the laws of *meum* and *tuum* are less rigorous here than at home. It is no unusual occurrence for a driver going along a desolate road with no passengers to offer a lift to any solitary pedestrian he may find on the road. He will not, needless to say, go out of his way if duty forbids, but just drop his passenger at the nearest point to the destination for which he is bound. Nor, in a place where there are hardly any public vehicles to be had, is one shy of "asking for a lift," a proceeding which one can hardly picture at home.

*November 18th.* Out of evil comes good, and if ill-health has temporarily paralysed my activities, it has at least given me time and opportunity to see something of the environment of the place that has been our home for so long.



November, 1915

There is one hospital base fringing the sea and situated in the pine forests which once formed one of the smartest little golfing centres of the coast whither Fate took me. There can be no harm in describing it, for already we are told a most exact and minute description has appeared in the German medical papers!

Almost a year ago we had visited it, seen the magnificent wards of the — Hospital that has now been converted for the use of officers, and visited a large French hospital.

It had been run almost entirely by untrained voluntary Englishwomen with a modicum of experience who apparently diagnosed their own cases and treated them accordingly. Well I recall the hall of dusky Zouaves gobbling up their midday meal, or disposing of what victuals they did not require on to the sanded floor, just as a vision of English beauty, clad in the daintiest of nursing creations, tripped out of a side ward, her eyes aglow with excitement.

“I *know* he’s got enteric,” she exclaimed cheerfully to our cicerone, pointing to her patient and glancing at the Red Cross book in her hand. “I *know* he’s got enteric, and I shall treat him for it.”

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Exactly how many patients that charming girl managed to dispose of I haven't discovered, but, as the Court Circular announced her marriage shortly afterwards, we may assume that the Zouaves proved enough. What the hospital lacked in operating theatres in those days it made up for in "dressing-rooms," where doctors and nurses worked side by side, and when aseptic conditions always, anti-septic measures generally, were things unknown."

And now? Along the roadside lie huts with accommodation for over twenty thousand patients, with all the requisite medical staff, and within quite a small area no fewer than four of our canteens have replaced the small tent of other days, whilst individual enterprises run by free lances, commonly known by their nicknames of "Lady Angelina Flapcabbage" and "Mrs. Always Huntem," still flourish.

*November 19th.* Of the observation airships that have passed daily over our field on their way to prospect in the Channel, I have said but little; yet they are a very interesting item of our daily programme as they search for mines and torpedoes on a still day, wirelessly their messages back to the aerodrome some miles away.



THE MARQUEE DEVOTED TO THE STORAGE OF TABLES, ETC.



THE BUSY DINNER-HOUR IN A HUT





November, 1915

It was my good fortune to visit the hangars to-day.

As the car sped along in the waning light and drew up before the wooden huts which form the officers' and men's quarters, the great hangar, painted in varied hues for all the world like a giant toy tunnel, formed an impressive sight.

The officers of the R.N.A.S. have a way of making their bunks as shiplike as possible, and the neatness of the place, the well-arranged vases of flowers, the well-made curtains, bore out the nautical reputation for almost feminine "nattiness."

Without, one was challenged on all sides by vigilant sentries who guarded entrance and egress to the place, to say nothing of the upturned anti-aircraft guns, whilst grey naval cars panted in and out on their business.

The sea of mud and general dampness contributed to the illusion that one was aboard, as two men came up to ask for leave to "go ashore."

Perhaps the C.O. caught the look of inquiry in my eye.

"Ashore," he explained, "is the town of B——."

The little outlying villages, boasting scarce

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more than three shops amongst them, made the nearest town a matter of some importance.

Within the hangar lay all the trappings and trunks of those huge inflated monsters, whose levers regulate such wonderfully diverse bombs of destruction, and whose observer's seat might be a smoking-room arm-chair for comfort. From a corner, where lay the debris of derelict machines, we were allowed to purloin a small piece of the yellow fabric as a memento of our visit, whilst over the tea-table—for the quality of which there were many quite unneedful apologies—we came across the air jargon, of which hitherto only "dope" and "cold feet" had figured in our vocabulary.

## CHAPTER XV

December, 1915

*December 2nd.* Each honours list brings us greater surprises than the last, for it seems that a man who runs a military grocer's shop at the Base in perfect security is far more likely to reap a reward than a man risking his life daily in all the discomfort of the trenches!

We have been convulsed with laughter lately by the antics of a little chauffeur, erstwhile jockey, whose reckless driving has for some time been the talk of the place. He has long evaded the arm of the law, but the other night, very unwisely, knocked down an important French Staff Officer in the middle of a country road.

“ ‘Op in, and I’ll give yer a lift,” said the jockey in his most Cockney accent, with a jerk of the thumb towards the car, as he handed the French officer a two-franc piece to hold his tongue!

*December 3rd.* The French people often come to us with demands for contraband goods. “ Will

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we sell them just a *little* tea, as it is so expensive in France? Or cigarettes—just a few packets of Woodbines? Or some matches, as theirs, being a Government monopoly, are both dearer and of an inferior quality? ”

All these little favours we have regretfully to refuse, explaining that it would be a breach of faith with the French Government, whose kindness permits goods for the British Forces to come in untaxed and under bond, but who would not for a moment tolerate the abuse of this privilege.

But the R.A.M.C. have many opportunities of rendering little services to the civilian war sufferers.

The confidence in khaki felt by the French population is extraordinary and highly complimentary. If a child sprains an ankle or cuts his hand he will go to the first man in khaki for help, be he orderly or medical officer; and owing to the scarcity of French doctors, medical etiquette is waived for the time being, and our R.A.M.C. does wonderfully good work amongst the poor.

To-day our maid—“the little savage”—dropped a heavy window on her hand. It was badly contused, but she was more frightened than hurt, and cried unceasingly. Whilst I was don-



## December, 1915

ning a hat and coat to take her to the doctor she disappeared, much to my astonishment.

Half an hour later she turned up, all smiles.

“ I was afraid Mademoiselle might take me to a French doctor,” she said, brandishing a bottle of lead lotion triumphantly, “ so I went along to the big hospital that smells so strongly of good disinfectant ! ”

*December 20th.* Our days are busy preparing for our invitation Christmas tea, which, by the way, is to be postponed until New Year's Day, owing to the amount of festivities and work in the hospitals; but our interest is focused on affairs in Macedonia, the fall of Monastir, General Townshend's retreat to Kut-el-Amara, Sir John French's retirement from command in France, and, last of all, the withdrawal from Anzac and Suvla Bay.

*December 26th.* On Christmas Day we were occupied in decorating the building, whilst the men, true to their long-anticipated licence (for to-day restrictions are relaxed), grew very merry over their dinners, supplemented by unlimited beer. With what results, it were perhaps indiscreet to mention ! But hilarious visits from various groups

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of the prospective artists at hospital concerts, clad in their make-up of mufti and rakish top-hats, with a gait far from steady, make us wonder how much of the afternoon's programme will perforce have to be omitted!

*December 30th.* Our Sunday evening services are more enthusiastically attended since we organised a male voice choir, with our best pianist as president, and an erstwhile Sheffield photographer, who has sung at the musical festivals, as vice. Quite a number of undreamt-of denominations are drawn together by the bond of music.

One might almost classify music over here under three heads—extemporary, local, and imported; and it is not until one has stood in a crowded hall, or seen the enthusiastic reception accorded to every effort in that direction, that one realises the large rôle music plays in the existence of the average Briton, usually accredited with lack of artistic appreciation.

Some there are whose hunger for music is such that, all untutored in the art of playing, they are constrained to sit down to any tin kettle of a piano in a vain attempt to pick out some well-loved melody with one finger for hours at a time. At these

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moments the listeners are not altogether sorry that half the notes have grown dumb from disuse and dampness!

I wonder if there is anything in all billet, trench or Base existence to equal an extemporary concert? Whether the means at hand consist of a penny whistle and comb, a number of lusty voices, or the now almost obsolete Made-in-Germany mouth-organ, it matters not.

Invariably a leader of men arises (usually a pianist), and as invariably he shows a genius for discovering local talent. Maybe he has heard a pal engaged in trench-digging whistle an air from the "Messiah," maybe a deep voice bellows a few notes of "Till the Boys Come Home." As sure as he is there, the leader will collect his material for an impromptu "sing-song."

Then the fun begins. Private Jones, the silent, is discovered to be the possessor of a magnificent tenor voice, whilst Corporal Rawlinson, whose buffoonery is the joy of his company, displays extraordinary aptitude for comic songs and anecdotes, or a newly joined recruit, hitherto dubbed "Snowball" on account of his pallor, is discovered to have been a professional clog-dancer in pre-war days.



## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

The leader realises that here is material for a really good Christmas concert to which every C.O. in the vicinity may be invited with impunity. "A pantomime," someone suggests, and a pantomime is evolved. Solos, duets, choruses, all original, are worked up to a perfection that is incredible, and the neighbourhood is invited to "the Christmas Pantomime in Three Spasms," for which "carriages and stretchers" are to be ordered at nine o'clock.

At least, this is how the sergeant responsible for our splendid Christmas pantomime tells me it originated. Costumiers and wigmakers from home "come up to the scratch," as the men have it, and supply not only complete suits for Robinson Crusoe, Man Friday, Dick Whittington, and Fair Damsels, but make-ups for clowns and harlequins and all the other paraphernalia of pantomime.

Topical allusions and catchwords are the joy of the audience for many days to come, and in the intervals of the performance Sergeant Topham, as a coon, gives humorous anecdotes, and Sapper Hall sings solos, of which the refrains as a chorus are encored at least a dozen times.

It isn't very great music, but, as one who has heard most of the great music in most of the great



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capitals, I should like to state that there is no more impressive thing in the world than an old barn or outhouse "somewhere in Flanders," filled with men whose voices threaten to bring down what remains of the roof for very lustiness. It may be a hymn, it may be an old melody with modern ribald words, it is the primitive method primitive man employed in primæval times, of self-expression. And if Britons do not compose complicated "'Ymns of 'Ate," they do at least put into their "Tipperary" all the passion of love and patriotism and determination that otherwise, from sheer natural reserve, must remain unexpressed.

Of local talent there is much to say. Since the time of the *troubadours* and *trouvères* the fame of the French *chansons* has spread abroad, nor has the stress of war lessened our Allies' hold on the greatest of arts. Even now it is not hard to get together a number of musical souls to form a miniature orchestra to enliven dreary days.

The appearance of the band is apt to surprise one. The 'cellist, in private's uniform, has to be back in barracks by nine, he informs one; the first violin, a minute boy of twelve years old, with a couple of half-smoked cigarettes tucked behind his ears, casts his eyes longingly on whatever food is

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near. He is at a local school of music, and works so hard that he has little or no time to eat, he explains. The pianist is a bearded veteran whose six sons are fighting. He was once the *chef d'orchestre* at the one and only first-rate hotel, which is now full of wounded. An officer in the reserve plays the viola; he was a barber by profession, and picked up his music from an artist sister. Strange and diverse characters, they are all drawn together by the bonds of their art, and once they begin to play with all the finesse, all the charm and taste of their race, the incongruity of their appearance is forgotten. Nor is it necessary to say that the appreciation accorded by their khakied Allies is of unparalleled enthusiasm.

I do not remember ever to have heard anything more haunting than a "Marche des Estropiés," written by a wounded Frenchman as he lay in hospital and inspired by the ceaseless stream of lame and limping figures that hobbled past his window. It was a true sample of local talent that bordered on genius.

We had had a concert in a big wooden canteen hut, and for two hours the Frenchmen had entertained their Allies by a series of popular tunes. They did not attempt to hide their contempt at

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the fact that rag-times were more favourably received than chamber music, but they played them with a right good will nevertheless.

Martial law decreed lights out at nine o'clock, and at nine o'clock the men trooped out. Darkness reigned. Outside the rain beat down drearily on to the mud-bathed road, above which sound an occasional booming of distant guns was audible.

Someone said :

“ Can't we have some *music* now ? ”

The *chef d'orchestre* understood and smiled.

By the light of two candles the four musicians began to play. Their repertoire was big—they did not need to call upon Hun music ; they played “ Manon ” and the haunting Slav music, and Italian things that breathed sunshine and joy, and “ Sappho.”

For fear of the military police we blocked up every crack of the windows. Then, sobbing above the sound of the elements, rose the wail of the “ Marche des Estropiés,” till every corner of the darkened hall seemed flooded with light, and the soul of the most dead materialist was reborn.

“ My son composed it,” said the bearded old man, who alternately conducted as first violin and acted as pianist, simply, as the last long-drawn



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note died into the stillness. "And he is in the trenches."

It was only afterwards, when they had gone and the windows were unbarred and the incessant patter of the rain made the desolation of it all more awful than before, that we realised how we had hungered for music, and blessed the local talent that had lifted us for so short a time out of our weary and narrow rut.

Of imported music, one can only state that if it is to be imported from home, no matter what its quality or quantity, it will be greeted uproariously.

Great and small are welcomed alike. From the celebrated oratorio singers and rag-time kings to the obscure little girl who offers her services on the score of her promising soprano voice, no one goes away disappointed with their reception. We show no favouritism! The artists themselves confess that the bad acoustic properties of the ward hastily converted into a concert hall, the less boisterous yet none the less hearty applause, the small audience, necessitated by the beds and stretchers, all are compensated for by the gleam of happiness in the eyes of those blue-coated figures, the whispered "It was heaven" from the boy with the bandaged hand, the hand clasp of the one-



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armed man. They find their great reward as much in the feeble applause of the wounded as in the tumultuous ovation of the fighting men, or a hall crammed full of white-capped nurses.

A notice announcing the advent of a concert party from "Blighty" is one of the "thrills" of Front and Base existence. Everyone flocks to hear it, and the debt owed to the association whose generosity has made it possible for every Base, and a good many places "Further up the line" than the Base, to enjoy regularly these Lena Ashwell Concert Parties, which are one of the most civilising elements of life out here, can never be repaid.

To be kept in touch with the latest songs, the latest train of thought from home; to see, after months of the same war-worn faces and well-known uniforms, daintily-clad artists whose every movement bears a breath of home; to hear, after the eternal reiteration of the local favourites' small repertoire, new music, new voices, it borders on an earthly Paradise.

And, of course, the artists cater for the tastes of their different audiences, and never forget Mr. Thomas Atkins's love of hearing his own voice. Anything in which he can join rejoices his heart,

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

and a valse tuné played by a mediocre 'cellist, to which the men are asked to whistle, often receives an ovation infinitely superior to that accorded to a famous singer's rendering of old folk-songs, much to the concert director's surprise.

But then the valse was one that brought memories of home and twilight evenings spent with loved ones over the piano, or maybe visions of some irresponsible ball-room mood that our generation will never know again, and though it wasn't Great Music it went straight to the hearts of the hearers.

And so, no doubt, one day, when War no longer holds us in its grip, we shall hearken spell-bound to the strain of some melody that our local band of tin whistles and combs used to play, and mayhap with the divine discontent of humanity, we shall sigh softly for the good old days of France, bully beef and tin whistles.

**BOOK III**

**1916**

**Scrapped**





## CHAPTER XVI

### January, 1916

*January 1st, 1916.* Each New Year's Day one wonders afresh at the oddness of commencing the year in January, cold January, when all the world is engrossed in recovering from Christmas benevolence and bracing itself to hustle through the days with the minimum amount of cold, instead of Nature's New Year in April. January, this month of surprises, with its rain and sunshine, sleet and mists, its promises of rest soon to be found, is surely already a hoary old man with a life of infinite experience behind him, a month for achieving and not for beginning things.

At least, this is how we felt when the New Year's festivities, over which we had taken such trouble, commenced. Our tables, plentifully laid out with fruits, bonbons and crackers, the gifts of friends at home as well as those here, betokened rather Christmas than New Year gaieties.

If our decorations of green garlands, mistletoe,

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

holly and ribbons were more elegant than effective, they were, at any rate, appreciated, judging by our guests' criticism as they waited in a queue for the doors to open.

Throughout the tea, which kept us well occupied as, cans in hand, we filled and refilled cups, a first-rate volunteer concert party kept the room in roars of laughter.

Some A.S.C. officers (professionals in peace time) were especially clever in patter songs, and delight was unbounded when one of them, unrecognisable in a motley selection of our garments and a gorgeous wig, in which he impersonated a "flapper," moved coyly among the audience and, willing or unwilling, embraced all within his reach, singing in a high falsetto, "You made me love you."

For those unable to come to the early tea we hastily prepared a second spread for eight o'clock, during which time a local French orchestra played popular selections.

Thus, with much festivity, by which we hoped to make a slight break in the monotony of "this Base existence," ended New Year's Day, 1916. Successful though it was, to me at least there was a certain tinge of sadness, for it is impossible any

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longer to conceal the fact that, owing to failing health, my days of work are numbered.

To be "scrapped" like the Ford cars, to return home a derelict, a Rip van Winkle, is no pleasing prospect; but—*che sarà, sarà*. We are all fatalists now, like the men in the trenches.

Nor is the passing of so many familiar faces altogether a pleasing thing to contemplate, whilst the psychology of new arrivals leaves us marveling. Did *we* ever thrill at the sight of a crowded camp, a convoy, or feel an odd sensation of pride at the sight of the khaki-crammed rooms in the early days of our apprenticeship? Were we inspired to write long descriptions of "The Front"—as they insist on calling the Base—and of War?

Every now and then one feels tempted to say, "War? What do *you* know of war?"

"Have *you* seen men as they came down from the Front during the first mad months, primitive, demented, at their last gasp, ready to face death in any form rather than the hellish uncertainty they had just left? Have *you* heard the groans of the wounded, seen arms rotting off and legs smashed to pieces, and dressed black gaping holes in young boys' sides? Have *you* seen faces blown beyond

## Eighteen Months in the War Zone

recognition—faces eyeless, noseless, jawless, and heads that were only half heads?

“Have *you* stood by the dying and watched them in their last agonies, writhing with tetanus, and prayed God to give a speedy release from their sufferings?

“Have *you* been round the cold, extemporised wards and covered up countless restless forms on their pallets, smelt the smell of the mud-caked coats that were their pillows, soothed their coughs with what there was left of tinned milk, hearken-ing as they cried aloud in their sleep :

“‘Great Lord Jesus, help us!’

“Men who had probably not prayed since their childhood, men who had probably scoffed at the idea of God—have *you* heard them live through their battles again in their slumber or under anæsthetics? ‘Get at ’em, lads—now’s your last chance—give it ’em ’ot—ah! ah!’

“Have *you* removed clothes and boots from helpless limbs caked on by seven weeks’ mud and overrun with vermin? Have *you* seen forever nameless enemy corpses washed and carried out to the mortuary, and, enemy though they were, because of their youth, wished that you could tell their mothers you had done your best?



## January, 1916

“ When you have seen this—which you never can see, for this was ‘ In the beginning,’ and now the great System is prepared for every emergency—and not before, will you know what modern warfare means.”

Yet it is all something one would not have missed, although no sane person would face it a second time; for, as an American said recently : “ Those who have not participated in this war will be for ever lacking in something which is not to be recaptured later.”

*January 5th.* Not only did a Taube honour us with a visit to-day, but it actually deigned to drop a bomb or two and succeeded in killing a few women and children, though not a single man, just outside one of our huts. After an exciting chase it was brought down, we are told, off Calais; though exactly the object of the visit no one can imagine.

*January 15th.* In the evening the Gymkhana finals and prize-giving took place. It is surprising what an amount of sport can be found in an indoor affair of this sort.

True, it needs someone with a strong personality to organise, but such a personality is in our

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midst at the moment in the person of the Rev. Dr. F——, denomination unknown, but humour and strength of character undeniable. In spite of the fact that he acts as Master of Ceremonies, clad in a ludicrous medley of garments, khaki breeches, brown fisherman's blouse, canvas slippers that convert him into a true "Simplicitas," he is never for a moment lacking in the dignity necessary to a *Maître de Cérémonies*.

The greatest zeal is shown in participation of the different sports—the wheelbarrow race, the cock fight, hat-trimming competition, potato race, the spar pillow fight, for which an odd contrivance of wood has been erected over a buffer of mattresses, and other items of the varied programme.

Most fun was perhaps found in the shaving race, in which the palm was awarded to the man who shaved his victim most cleanly and quickly with the handle of a teaspoon.

*January 24th, Dawn.* It was about eight o'clock yesterday that the first alarm was given. In the stillness of the serene night the church bell began to toll; simultaneously the sound of whistles rent the air. Thinking it must be the military policemen on their nocturnal hunt for delinquents

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not yet in barracks, I put my head into a neighbouring café to drop a suggestive word of warning to two unwary sergeants lingering over their glasses of beer. It was not the military policemen, however, for from the distance a cry of "Fire!" resounded, and with the incredible rapidity characteristic of all rumours we learned that the Enteric Hospital was ablaze.

Guided by the smell of smoke and the dishevelled groups at the doorways, we found ourselves in the midst of the confusion. From the lower windows of the building a cloud of black smoke issued. Men on ladders, hose in hand, had smashed the windows—a fact which merely served to add fury to the flames.

"Turn the water on!" they cried, and even above the din of the gesticulating, gabbling crowd came the cry, "Turn the water on!" The Frenchman to whom the appeal was repeated shrugged his shoulders. He did not quite understand.

There is no wind; it is a divine night, as calm and clear as midsummer, with a bright moon looking smilingly on. It can yet be saved, this wonderful building, whence issue streams of khaki figures readjusting the respirators they had donned

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in place of smoke helmets, bearing with what care they can their precious burdens on beds and stretchers.

A voice beside me said :

“ Here, you, take *that!* ”

“ *That* ” proved to be a woman’s form which the speaker was carrying with the aid of a frail-looking little V.A.D., who, from the way she held the patient, had obviously never been in such a position before. I gripped the man’s hand, with a “ Don’t strain ; lie easy ! ” to the patient. We got her into a neighbouring house, where already two or three other bad cases are installed. Their beds are tilted upwards, they are clad in their hospital garments only.

“ Ah ! You’re there, Hope, ” says our burden, as we deposit her in a deep arm-chair, to the white-faced boy whose bed occupies most of the small room.

The coincidents of war are strange ! It is supposedly from this very patient that she has contracted the disease.

“ Yes, and he’s an officer now, ” came a nurse’s reply. “ Gazetted to-day. Did you know ? ”

They are very cosy and cheerful, and as yet the noise without has not penetrated the room.



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We pass out again. The fire is getting under way now ; clouds of black smoke issue from the windows of the first floor, and flames lick the upper balcony.

Still they cry for more water.

They have moved the patients from the beach to the side streets now. They lie on the roadway, already soaking in the water which, by reason of the countless leakages in the hose, fails to arrive anywhere near the scene of action.

In their eyes is a mute appeal, as a gust of wind hurls a shower of sparks over their helpless forms. Then a cloud of smoke hides them from our sight.

“ Is anyone left in the building ? ” is the question on everyone’s lips. A reassuring murmur goes round that no patients are left, and the firemen, looking strangely grotesque in their respirators, are now making efforts to save a few of the valuable instruments and records. Some of them are cut about the face by falling glass. From the open doors smoke begins to issue, and cries of “ Gangway, there ! Gangway ! ” The hot flames fan one’s cheeks. They come in spurts now. Great fascinating spurts ! One surmises which window next, and feels a ridiculous sensation of pride at being present, coupled with a longing to do something.

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The opportunity comes. Load after load one's hands are filled with apparently valuable documents. "Officers' Mess," shout the men who place them there, as one moves off to find an entrance to the building.

On returning the noise is greater than ever. The rescued are being deposited anywhere—everywhere—wildly—*pêle-mêle*. Red blankets fall from windows, papers flutter a moment, adding to the general danger, and get trodden under foot in the mud.

"The left wing is doomed. Can they save the right?"

"Why don't they blow it up to safeguard the adjoining houses?"

Fragments of conversation float from all sides. Everyone has suggestions to make, but it seems to be no one's business to carry them out.

One's thoughts fly to those patients on the stretchers, and one wonders why this must be added to all they have already endured. Many of them will die of shock. It all seems so unnecessary. And all this time, silently and with dignity, the electric lights in the right wing of the great edifice burn on.

What are those old stone walls feeling as their

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invincible enemy creeps on? They who have seen so much of the levity of peace time, so much of the sorrow of war, have come to their end at last. They meet their fate bravely, unflinchingly, with the fortitude of the captain of an abandoned ship.

One thinks of all the comedies and tragedies that have been enacted within these walls, the laughing romances of summer days, the weary suffering. One recalls the months of valuable research work that have been carried on in the improvised laboratories—discoveries to benefit mankind—all may be irrevocably lost.

One thinks of all the things lying there—the little personal things—the treasures that can never be replaced—the lover's first gift, the parent's last letter.

\* \* \* \* \*

The doomed building has been abandoned. The moon gleams red through the veil of sparks and smoke on to the crowd that has congregated on the beach. Watching the Ypres-like eddies of flame, one casts a thought at the surprise of the arrivals on incoming troopships; one wonders if folks at home, too, are watching the stupendous beacon.

It is all a matter of time now, and the watching

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is so full of suspense that the end is anxiously awaited by all. A wind is springing up with the oncoming sea, endangering the neighbouring buildings, more especially the adjacent infectious compound composed of carefully isolated bathing-boxes.

On the roof of each stands an orderly extinguishing the sparks as they fall by means of buckets of sand and water handed up by the crowd below.

To the horror of fire is added the horror of risk from infection, as the rudely awakened patients are hurried from their involuntary isolation. As the roaring flames draw nearer, ambulances reeking of disinfectants hurry backwards and forwards with their loads.

The flames run on ; turning, twirling and twisting, they play round the glowing beams and iron girders, revelling in their might, licking their chops, one might almost say, as the dull, uncanny thuds of falling masonry bring terror to the hearts of the onlookers.

Then a strange thing occurs. Of a sudden the roof falls in with a crash, dome and eaves, and against the sky stands the flaming skeleton of the ruin. Simultaneously a great red cross glows for



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a space of time on the southern side. And, although it is only a burning window frame, it seems to us to symbolise the invincibility of that great universal emblem of mercy—the Red Cross.

*January 25th.* With the dawn we visit the ruins. An uncanny stillness reigns as the waning moon gleams through the charred framework. Distorted bedsteads hang by a thread from skeleton balconies, charred heaps of clothing and paper litter the ground. Isolated beams and fragments gleam, ghostlike, in the desolate upper stories, shedding every few moments a thin shower of sparks. A slight wind fans the one remaining corner into a bright blaze. The thin stream of water is still being played, by way of precaution, upon the adjoining houses.

A French sentry, leaning wearily on his rifle, guards the approach on one side, whilst on the other a British Military Policeman has installed himself upon an empty cask to make the best of his long wait.

Through the cavernous window frames, from gaping cavity to gaping cavity, heedless of the floors that are no more, the wind passes like a

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restless, moaning spirit. All the wonder, all the excitement, all the glory of its glorious end has passed. There remains only the smouldering debris, the blackened, unbeauteous bricks, the after-smell of burnt-out burning.

Later in the day many sightseers began to appear, some even walking out from the town before their day's work began to verify the reports. For, needless to say, many were the rumours about the fire which had reached them, and they were with difficulty persuaded that—a few cuts and scratches from broken glass excepted—there had not been a single casualty.

In an existence so *choc-à-bloc* with meetings and partings as ours, it is only a few of the better-known faces that remain in our memory. Yet there came into our hut this morning a man whom we shall not easily forget! He came with a kindly-faced N.C.O., who explained that they were “joy-riding.” It was, one surmised from his shyness, the patient's first outing, for he seemed as yet unaccustomed to his disfigurement, which was, to say the least of it, appalling, and which, by means of his large muffler and averted head, he made vain efforts to conceal.

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Something in the appeal in the eyes of that pallid, crooked face that may once have been handsome, something of the pathos of that limping, bent young figure, as he stood by the counter declining the sergeant's persuasion to take something, with a pathetic gurgle, only just comprehensible, of, "I can't eat! You *know* I can't eat," touched us all particularly.

And to think that this is but one of thousands of cases for ever haunted by their own hideousness, for ever dependent on others. Such things as this it is that have wrought us to such a pitch of indignation that the words are apt to escape our lips, "God strafe Germany, the author of this devastation!"

## CHAPTER XVII

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*February 3rd.* To-day we are debating as to whether or not a genuine spy has been within our grasp and wriggled out again. The sum of the matter is this :

Boarding a crowded tram on its way into town, we were fain to avoid the closeness of the overcrowded interior by standing on the conductor's more airy platform. The conductor himself, an ill-grown little Belgian *réformé*, seemed pleased enough of company, judging by the avidity with which he poured forth his sorrows into our sympathetic ears.

Since the fall of Antwerp he has had no word from his young wife, nor has he been able to get a line through to her to inform her that he is alive. His terror lest she should wed again before his return was pathetic.

“*Hélas!*” he kept sighing. “Has not Belgium suffered more than all countries put together?”



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We did not rejoin, as we might well have done, that valiant Belgium's losses can only be compared with the sum of English lives expended in maintaining, maybe for sentimental as much as strategical reasons, that little hell round Ypres that represents all that remains of King Albert's country ; for at about this moment a dark man in some kind of police uniform joined in the conversation.

He, too, was Belgian, he explained, and in charge of the refugees in the neighbourhood.

"The French hardly welcome us cordially," he said, "but I do my best to help the poor creatures whom Fate leads this way."

The conversation drifted to the recent air raid on London.

"I wonder they don't come here," said the conductor.

"On dit qu'il y a trop d'espions !" I remarked simply.

The dark man jumped, and, winking significantly, whispered in my ear :

"One can't talk here. You are in it too?"

Utterly taken aback, I was dumb for a moment. Had I by chance come upon one of the members

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of that huge octopus-like system of enemy espionage?

Then, moved by some unaccountable impulse, I nodded knowingly, and pointed out to sea.

“You know, then?” he asked, nodding in the direction in which I pointed. “Oui! Après la guerre.”

What could he mean? What was I expected to know, to be participating in?

I shall never learn; for at that moment the tram drew up, and with an unexpectedly hearty handshake and hopes of meeting again soon, this protector of the Belgians alighted and disappeared into the crowd.

Who could he be? “*Après la guerre*”—what did it mean? I wonder.

*February 6th.* My diary draws to a close. To-day we went for the last time to the little church on the hill.

What a number of illusions have been dispelled since that October morning in 1914 when we first crept in late from the hospital, indoor uniform and all, just as we had come off duty!

The place had been packed then with warriors caked with the mud of Flanders. How their voices

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had resounded! For in the hearts of all was the cherished belief, "It is all too awful. It can't last long."

"Peace, perfect peace, with loved ones far away." What a significance the familiar words had taken on in the unfamiliar surroundings.

And to-day? For congregation a few tired nurses, an odd officer or two, some civilians over here visiting their wounded and dying.

A service devoid of the burning enthusiasm of other days, a sermon that did not even mention war, or spur us on to greater efforts, or vindicate our cause, but dealing with obscure ritual and spiritual difficulties not likely to waylay most of us.

Undoubtedly our illusions are past. We have learnt our limitations as a nation; discovered the inherent nobility of many whose capacities had hitherto lacked opportunity, seen how war brings out the best and the worst of every character, and noted that at the bed-rock of all men lies the primitive savage.

The respect we so generously accorded our enemies in the beginning is replaced by a justifiable contempt for their barbarities. A certain allowance is made for soldiery fighting under the influence of ration drugs, but when we read, as

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we have to-day, of the death of three hundred Serbians, forced by Germans and Bulgarians to dig their own graves and then, having bound each other's eyes, await a horrible massacre, we are no longer justified in our tolerance.

We are up against a foe whose devilish unscrupulousness is only equalled by scientific cunning. And to combat his ingenuity, to rid the world of his demoralising degeneracy, every resource of the Empire must be brought into play.

Not merely individual but national sacrifice is needed. Conscription of labour and wealth and land, governors whose only inducement to govern is the joy of serving, a free Press and, above all, a sane and scientific education to fit our children to take the highest place among nations in the tremendous commercial war of the future.

Gone are the days of blind optimism and hope; gone the men who passed through and found a few hours' solace within these grey walls; gone the youth that made the impossible appear achievable. The very stones seemed listless, the dim daylight, filtering through high windows, weary.

An old Staff Colonel in front of me leant against the grey pillar and wept like a child.



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Was he mourning one of those who passed through earlier? Most of them have gone West by now.

In the interim of the swelling organ rose the cry of the wind in moans and sobs round the old stones whose founder had passed away this very morning.

Such was St. John's-on-the-Hill.

Mists lay all over the city and over the dashing sea as we wended our way for a last visit to the camps, where we lent a helping hand.

It is as wonderful as the never-extinguished vestal fire, this work that has no ending—these huts where no sooner is one batch of troops sent on than another arrives, with time only for occasional spasmodic cleanings.

A battalion of K.'s "contemptible little Army" had arrived during the night. If, after nineteen months' fighting, this is the specimen of manhood England can produce—well knit, in the prime of condition, the embodiment of health and strength—all one can say is: "*Cave, Germania!*"

And though to collect the ever-dwindling supply of mugs (beginning with a thousand on Monday, one may safely reckon to find but 800

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by Saturday night! Where they walk to no man knows—sometimes homewards, more often trenchwards, one surmises), although to collect the mugs it is a literal necessity to step over figures that lie huddled against each other in a sleep so deep, so log-like, that nothing disturbs them, one is none the less impressed by their magnificence.

The evolution of the camp canteen is a thing to note. There is the wooden roof and flooring in place of the close interior of a boardless, draughty tent; there is an augmented staff, for ever cooking and stewing, to cope with the work; and stores are conveyed regularly to the place, obviating the necessity for those spasmodic rushes to fetch substitutes for bread when the supply of everything gave out at the same moment.

To be sure, the difficulties of taking the till remain the same, and the problem of changing an English pound-note into French money at 26 francs 30 centimes—the last time we were here the rate was 25 francs—subtracting the price of a cup of tea, a packet of shag, a pencil and a shaving stick, doling out all these articles with the exception of the tea; immediately afterwards rendering a French three francs into English coin, subtract-

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ing for a bar of chocolate and a hand mirror. Continuing this process uninterruptedly and unceasingly for an hour, during which time one is assailed by a chorus of questions such as “What’s the price of a ’am sandwich, Miss?” “What time does the leave boat go?” “What *mayn’t* we put in a letter home?” etc., *ad lib.*; all this to the non-mathematician is bewildering in the extreme.

At the old Queen Mary Hut, where my apprenticeship had been served, the development was even more amazing. A billiard-room, with no fewer than four tables supplied by a benevolent speculator, has been built, and a row of baths for men on their way home, whilst the kitchens are so finished that they might well be envied by any efficient housewife.

But perhaps the culminating point is the cinema hall that has been opened not far off—a cinema hall to accommodate a goodly number, and worthy of the Metropolis itself.

There was a last committee meeting too; those committee meetings that were landmarks on our calendar. They were a fortnightly institution, and consisted of the lady superintendents of the different centres, who met the camp leaders—the

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male portion of the staff—every month. Their purport was to discuss the affairs of state, business difficulties, etc.

By one who was competent to judge they were described as the “safety valve for ladies who *must* grouse,” and certainly there *was* a good deal of talk about nothing. One lady would ask how many swabs and dusters it was permissible to buy for one hut—a question which might, or might not, duly be recorded in the minutes. The next would complain of her indolent orderlies. Important questions in themselves, but not of great use to those of us who found it possible to settle these matters amongst ourselves!

The agony I had gone through during those early committee meetings will be for ever remembered, for, being the only unmarried woman under forty in a community bent on filling all vacancies with their personal friends, my position was not enviable. But for a sense of humour it would have been intolerable. Over and over again the question of age would arise as I would sit in dumb impotence whilst one inquisitor after another voiced their views.

“Miss B—— would be excellent in charge of X—— centre if she weren’t so young. I know



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officially she is only thirty, and it would not do."

"We don't approve of young women," said another. "*There*, of course, is the exception," bowing to me.

Seeing I was many years younger than the youngest worker, my feelings can better be imagined than explained. My own experience is that the best workers range from twenty-five to forty, and over that age no woman should be allowed in the war zone. There is no room in the system of "scrap and discard" for those who are easily fatigued; and women unaccustomed to manual work, however enthusiastic they may be, are unable to acclimatise themselves to it as they get on in years.

For *endurance*, too, younger women are needed. As a subaltern, invalided down with nerves after seventeen months' fighting, said to me recently :

"It's all a matter of time—the only difference is, we younger ones can stand it longer."

The same holds good for women's work. Spurts of energy followed by collapse are useless. It is the power of steady endurance that is required, and found most often in younger women.

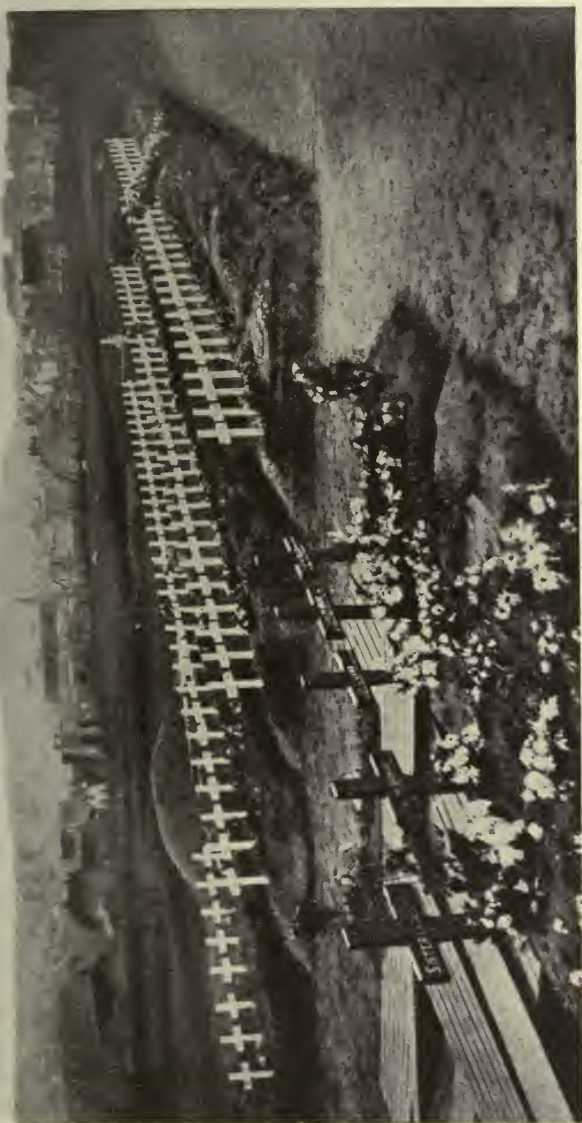
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Nor is there any room for the caprices of the dangerous age. The past generation was not brought up with the public school *esprit de corps* which characterises the modern girls, and which has taught them to play for their side or institution, and not for their own ends.

But to get back to the committee meeting, and to do justice to its evolution, I must state that after all these months, during which we have combated for automatic rising as recognition of work for the Reward of Service, it has adopted the broader view that not personal acquaintances but proved workers are most deserving of responsibility, whether old or young.

*February 10th.* My final impression of the place was a beautiful one. An extemporary concert, with many choruses, a packed house, an enthusiastic, cheering audience. It is like a very beautiful dream that we had dreamed true, this place; and, now that it is sufficiently perfect, other and fresher hands than ours must take it over—fresher, but not more loving.

Here in this little out-of-the-way corner of the globe, in a very insignificant work, we have buried all our youth and most of our vitality. God! but



"THE CITY OF LITTLE WHITE CROSSES"





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it is hard to relinquish the reaping to others!  
“To renounce without bitterness!”

A last glimpse of that City of Little White Crosses, where, past pain, past suffering, in rows of close formation—closer than they ever stood in lifetime shoulder to shoulder—lie those who are “for ever England.”

Could they but see those dear shores of home they had so longed for with their dying breath, radiating their messages of pride and thankfulness across the Channel, how proud they would be!

A military cemetery “Somewhere in France” is a thing one does not forget. If, one day when peace reigns, we are once more growing slothful and negligent of the bigger issues of life, let us pay a yearly pilgrimage to one of these shrines of our honoured exiles.

True, the French gravediggers will no longer be shovelling the sandy soil over the newest comers, hiding the tier upon tier of plain deal coffins or the number-plates that are the only distinguishing marks; true, the unwonted odour of Death will no longer haunt our nostrils; mayhap we, too, shall be deaf to the sighing of the many souls in the wind. Yet surely the warrior spirits will arise and strengthen us, whispering: “Let

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us not have died in vain. We laid down our lives for the Old Country. For the love of God 'carry on,' as we had hoped to do."

A last look at the faces of those friends who for many months have formed my whole world.

Then "Cheer up, you have done your bit," they cry as we step aboard. As if any man, woman or child of Britain has done his bit until this thing is over, until there is some semblance of the crushing victory that shall lay our unscrupulous enemy low!

Then on to the boat.

One parting gift that was pressed into my hands on leaving will be treasured for all time. It is John Oxenham's little volume "All's Well," and to us out here it seems as if he has been divinely inspired to bear the message of hope to countless broken hearts.

*"Is the pathway dark and dreary?*

*God's in His heaven!*

*Are you broken, heart-sick, weary?*

*God's in His heaven!*

*Dreariest roads shall have an ending,*

*Broken hearts are for God's mending,*

*All's well! All's well!*

*All's . . . . . well!"*

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Travelling on board a troopship is not exactly the acme of comfort for a woman at the best of times, and for anyone in bad health it is distinctly unpleasant, for the decks are so crowded with warriors that instinctively one makes one's way towards the ladies' saloon, only to find, alas! that it serves as the general sleeping compartment for officers. No sooner is the first throb of the engine felt than the water-tight doors are closed, and one is continually running into insurmountable walls.

If, after many efforts, one *does* attain the ladies' saloon by means of a cicerone to guide one across the masses of inert forms sprawled over the decks, and down various dark passages and narrow iron ladders, it is only to discover that the once cosy saloon has become an excessively close compartment, from which, rather than be drowned like a rat in a trap if a torpedo comes along, it were better to flee to the inclemency of the upper decks.

As we boarded the boat at 10 A.M., however, on this bright February morning, everything promised well. Already the lower decks were crammed with life-belted Tommies. Life belts are the order of the day now, and in many cases

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there is life-saving practice as well, as a safeguard against any emergency.

All eyes were turned "Blightywards" in anticipation of home, and to check their impatience the men began to sing. The volume of the song swelled to such an extent that it threatened to bring the upper decks down, for the voices were those of men who had earned their leave.

"We must be waiting for some Staff knut," said a subaltern in the crowd, gazing sadly at the guarded gangway, off which no one might pass once their papers had been scrutinised, towards the buffet so temptingly near.

Fragments of conversation were borne in from all sides; some of them savoured of pantomime, others of the pathetic humour of harlequin.

A *very* temporary "gentleman" second lieutenant leant against the rail twirling an imperceptible moustache. Although he addressed his remarks to a sergeant of the Artists' Rifles on his way home to take up a commission, they were obviously intended for the edification and squashing of the whole audience.

"Will you—er—stick to the Service—er—après la guerre?" he inquired, flicking his muddy



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boots with his swagger cane. One expected to see him place a monocle in his eye and cap his remarks with a "What—what?" in simulation of the theatrical swell. The sergeant's reply was inaudible, but he was obviously a sahib.

"I—er—expect to—if—er—the Service is still possible. Now one has to hobnob with one's—er—tailor. . . ."

If the onlooker were seized with a desire to throttle the young jackanapes he stifled it with the consoling thought that he, too, was doing his bit, and might turn aside to note that the bronzed Indian Staff Major at the entrance to the hatchway was being addressed by his General.

"*That* isn't mine?" he asked, pointing to a frailly packed paper parcel of awkward dimensions held together by a frayed piece of string.

"No, sir. That's something Colonel M—— got for his son in Paris—toys!" he added in an awestruck whisper that sounded like a sigh.

The General turned on his heels, also with a sigh, and an "I see!"

Perhaps they both thought of days when their sons, too, were safe in the nursery.

I followed the crowd down to the saloon and fed on what there was—coffee and ship's biscuit.

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Being only a civilian, and a wreck at that, I was served with a gentle consideration that bordered on contempt. Longingly my thoughts wandered to the buffet on the Quai.

The sun and the tide rose higher and higher, the gangway sloped upwards to the deck instead of downwards as when we came aboard. I looked at the well-ordered crowd and closed my eyes. In an instant the Boulogne of eighteen months ago came back to me, the Boulogne that knew War and the horrors of War.

I saw before me the vast consignments of goods that lay along the quayside, destined, one realised helplessly, never to reach their owners. Overcrowded, understaffed ambulance trains steamed into the station—trains that once bore us to the Sunny South—disgorging their sad burdens, who lay on stretchers in the never-ceasing rain, awaiting the arrival of hospital ships.

Many died in the rain in those days, until that Medical Officer was inspired to haul them into the disused sugar-shed clearing station. Where once stood the mortuary is now the innocuous Censor's office. In place of the cheerless barn, whose walls could tell so many tales, a well-ordered post office.

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I turned away, haunted by the cries of the dead and dying I had seen. Not the most solid edifices of masonry can obliterate the gruesome realities of a vivid memory.

A cheer went forth from the lower deck as two mine-sweepers, bearing a prize intended to send us to our doom, swept majestically into the harbour. The canteen workers, who had been allowed aboard with food for the men, moved off, the gangway was hauled in. Another troopship, alongside ours, partially obstructed our final view of the old town.

Convoys of ambulances stand, as they have stood for nigh on two years, in front of the old Red Cross Headquarters. Coal carts, their owners crying their goods in the low, monotonous wail peculiar to themselves, still ply along the roads, side by side with cars of every description, from Rolls-Royces to the "Rolls-Fords" (no one is ashamed to be seen in a Ford in the war zone). Uniforms of every kind, khaki and the grey, red-tipped nurses, predominate.

Tinkling their bells, the trams wend their way in and out of the town, driven mostly by decrepit Belgian *réformés* whose tales of sorrow and wonder would fill volumes. Picturesque groups of sabotaged

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fisherwomen cluster round a skiff as the gleaming fish are unloaded.

*Tiens!* We are off! The watertight compartments are shut. The sun, already sinking low, tints the pinnacles of the old church, lights up the windows of the fishing village with fairy-like colours. One last look at the masts that rise out of the mists, the gleaming, winding river, the camps, the tents, all that goes to make that wonderful elusive thing "The Base" in the war zone.

Gulls follow our course and swoop down in vain search of a meal!

In my throat is a stifled sob. So *this* is the end. Broken in body, I am to leave the work I love, and with it youth and vitality—and this whilst the fighting wages hardest in the West.

One last look at the sun-bathed shore, and then the boats swing outwards on their davits and hide it all from view.



## EPILOGUE

It is an odd coincidence that the last words of this War Diary should be penned by candlelight in a darkened northern town, to the sound of bombs falling on an entirely defenceless city. With the truly sporting instinct of Britons, everyone has turned out to see what they may of the "fuss" by which our humane foe hopes to terrorise us. By the light of flares the great marauding machines of destruction are seen to hover apparently stationary. It is a fitting moment to add a note of apology to this book, of apology to those whose homes have been ravished and who might, therefore, resent the reflection that as yet our Island has not felt the full pinch of war; of apology to those and of explanation.

For it is needless to say this diary was originally kept for purely personal reasons, with no idea of publication, but from the desire one day to make good to those at home the silences enforced by a rigorous censor.

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Seeing, however, that the interest manifested in our existence at the Base seems general enough to warrant the appearance of these pages, and seeing there is no one else to tell the tale, I send my little volume into the world with the prayer that it may give to those who would know, some idea of Boulogne as she now is, that it may carry one or two momentarily away from their own sufferings.

To achieve this is all I ask.

If in some parts I have spoken too freely, I crave forgiveness on the score that I have but recounted things as we saw them at the time. If, on the other hand, there are many omissions, it must be noted that a War Diary published during war time is of necessity much expurgated to meet the demands of the censor. Nor would it be in the interests of anyone to tell of chance meetings with well-known men and women whose rôle in the Great Game has not yet been brought to light.

And for any dates misplaced I must plead the extenuating circumstances of a busy, restless life that left little leisure for the keeping of a detailed daily diary.

Of the many friends who are still carrying on

## Epilogue

the work out there I have spoken but little, not because there is little to say, but because my heart is too full of the great work they are doing, and the memory of little kindnesses rendered to a derelict in the midst of so much that is more pressing. May they in their turn, if time renders them "scrapped" and useless, find joy in the remembrance of their work, and peace in the hope of one day serving again.

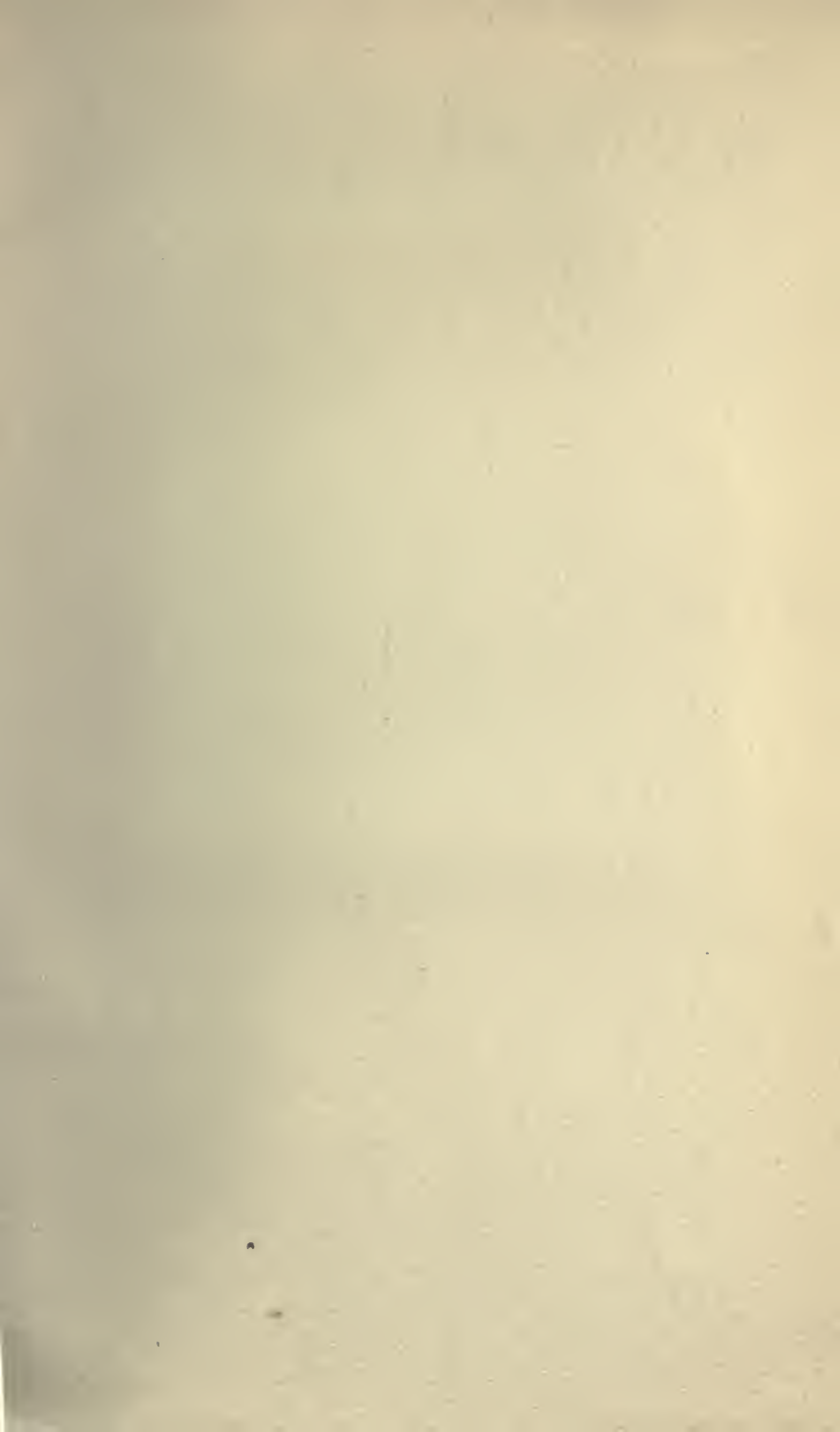
As Kipling has it :

*" Only the Master shall praise us, and only the Master shall  
blame,  
And no one shall work for money and no one shall work for  
fame,  
But each for the joy of working. . . . "*

YORKSHIRE, May, 1916.

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